LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS EKEV

BY

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS EKEV

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Ekev* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

> "The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of

thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

The parsha Ekev stands out because of both its name as well as its content.

The name Ekev has been given multiple meanings but, the one that is most poignant is "heel" and that it refers to the historical period we are presently in' known as *ikvesa d'meshicha*-the Heels of Moshiach.

That should give us some insight into how this parsha can provide us with inspiration and guidance in these last moments of Galus-exile as we prepare for the true and complete

Redemption.

The second theme of this parsha is contained in *'haya im shamo'a,* which forms the second parsha of the Shema.

Rashi explains that it deals with the Mitzvos we should do as a preparation for the future Redemption.

ESSAY ONE

HEELS: THE LOWEST AND THE HIGHEST

Conventional wisdom teaches us that despite being on the ground you can still climb high.

Chassidic wisdom believes that *because* you are so low you can climb high!

ESSAY ONE

HEELS: THE LOWEST AND THE HIGHEST

The "heels" of Moshiach

This week we read the Torah portion Ekev, in which Moses relates the blessings the Jewish people can look forward to in the future if they keep G-d's commandments. Since this portion speaks about the future, it is connected with the times of *ikvesa d'Meshicha—the* time immediately preceding the Final Redemption

The Rebbe explains that the word "ekev" can mean "heel," the least sensitive portion of the body. In this instance, *Ikvesa d'Meshicha* refers to the lowest of all levels in the spiritual history of the Jewish people, a time characterized by a redoubled spiritual darkness, in which all the undesirable omens that our sages said would precede the Era of the Redemption have taken place.

Primary among the negative characteristics of *ikvesa d'meshiacha* is the increased chutzpah.

This points to the lack of respect for authority.

"The Buttons Were Already Polished"

But "ekev" can also mean "after" and thus *ikvesa d'Meshiacha* can refer to the end of the exile. This, too, refers to our generation. For as the Previous Rebbe said, we have already "polished the buttons"—we are like soldiers of old awaiting inspection, everything is ready, even the brass buttons on our uniforms have been shined. This means that all the service demanded of us has been completed and we are on the threshold of the Redemption.

The two interpretations of the term "*ikvesa d'Meshicha*" are interrelated. It is precisely when the Jews have reached the low levels implied by the first interpretation, that the ultimate fulfillment promised by the second interpretation will be realized.

We may apply the Rebbe's connection between the two interpretations to the defining vice of our generation, which as stated, is the increase in chutzpah.

On many occasions the Rebbe pointed out that the chutzpah of our generation, particularly among the youth, is one of its finest attributes.

It is this spirit of chutzpah that has motivated many of our youth, or the young at heart, to question the corruption of the past. The chutzpah of our youth in the 60's and 70's rebelled against the secularism, materialism and selfishness of their elders.

It is true, that the rebellious spirit of that age did lead many astray into cults, drugs and other vices, nevertheless it is not the chutzpah and rebelliousness that is the culprit, rather it is the way it was applied.

The Rebbe would stress that if the Jewish leaders would have performed their task and would have provided the youth with the proper channels for their energy and rebellious streak, it would have proven to be the most powerful force for good.

Hearts of Parents Restored Through Children!

The Rebbe also connected the holy chutzpah to the Biblical prediction of how the young will bring their parents back to their Judaism.

This, the Rebbe based on the prophecy of the last of the Biblical prophets Malachi who stated that in the end of the days G-d will send Elijah the prophet who "will restore the heart of the fathers to the sons." Rashi, in his commentary substitutes the word "through" for "to" and renders this verse thus: "He will restore the hearts of the fathers **through** the sons."

Throughout Jewish history, it was the fathers and mothers who transmitted the timeless teachings of Torah to their children. However, something tragic occurred in the last few centuries. As the secular winds started to blow, as a result of the "Enlightenment," fathers and mothers were separated from their traditions. The chain of tradition was severed.

The Great Shofar

The 1960's with the miraculous victory of the Six Day War, brought an unprecedented awakening, which the Rebbe referred to as the Great Shofar/ This awakening ignited the spark of our youth and propelled a major movement of Ba'alei Teshuvah—returnees to

Judaism, who, in turn, influenced their parents and elders to return to the fold.

Responding to, and actually anticipating, these new positive winds that were blowing the Rebbe launched an unprecedented campaign to reach all the Jews with a Mitzvah. The Mitvzah campaigns literally involved millions of Jews in the performance of Mitzvos.

In addition, the Rebbe launched the institution of *Shluchim*-Emissaries who were to bring the light of Judaism, as it is illuminated further by Chasidic teaching, to every far-flung corner of the globe.

To date, hundreds and thousands of Jews were brought back to a life of observance, while millions more have been inspired to do a Mitzvah. The Rebbe emphasized the inestimable value of even one Mitzvah which can "tip the scales" of virtue and bring Redemption.

As we entered into the 20th Century, the welfare of the Jewish people (and by extension the rest of the world) degenerated to the very nadir. It would prove to be the worst period of history. The twin tragedies of the Holocaust and Soviet tyranny on one

hand and the indifference and alienation of Jews from their roots in the Western World on the other hand, placed us in the unenviable position of the heels of history in the most negative sense of the word.

If the Holocaust was the worst tragedy to befall the Jewish people, it could only be matched by the indifference and insensitivity of the world to these atrocities. Here to the simile of a heel is appropriate, because of all the parts of the body it is the least sensitive to physical stimuli.

The U-Turn

And then, G-d in His infinite mercy, provided us with the ability to turn away from the negatives, An important part of this reversal of direction was the leadership of the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe and particularly his successor, our Rebbe, who launched a historic and unprecedented "u-turn."

Instead of Jews running away from Judaism, a new phenomenon emerged. Jews were returning in droves. As time progressed, as the Rebbe predicted would be a prelude to

the coming of Moshiach, the Soviet Union collapsed.

To be sure, we are not out of the woods as long as even one vestige of exile remains. However this can be likened to a person going on a trip and makes a wrong turn. When he recognizes his error and makes a U-turn, it changes the entire dynamic of the experience.

Although on the road back, there can be obstacles, construction, State Troopers, deer crossings, drunk drivers, etc., we know that we are on the road that leads inevitably and inexorably to our destination.

What G-d wants of us now that we are so close to the Messianic destination is for us to get rid of the "minor" distractions from our goal. We must focus on the objective, the ekev-the end, which is Moshiach and the Final Redemption!

ESSAY TWO

HIGH HEELS

Reaching the 100 mark from 99 can be more dramatic than reaching from 1 to 99!

ESSAY TWO

HIGH HEELS

Why was Moses Denied?

This week's parsha continues Moses' final words to the Jewish nation in which he recounts the events of the past and prepares them for their eventual entry into the land; entry that he was denied, as recounted in last week's parsha..

When reading these dramatic words, about the eventual conquest and settlement of Israel by the Israelites then and by their descendants in the future, one cannot help asking the questions, why and how? **Why** was Moses, the greatest person in history—despite the "sins" that are attributed to him —denied the opportunity to enter into the Promised Land? And **how** are we—who in comparison to Moses are so apparently insignificant—worthy of achieving that which was denied Moses?

The Answer: *Ekev*

The answer to these questions is actually provided for in the very title of this week's

parsha —*Ekev*. The opening verse reads:

> "And it will come to pass, that because [*Ekev*] you will listen to these judgments and you will guard them and observe them, that G-d, your G-d, will keep His covenant, kindness that He swore to your fathers...and He will bless you on the land that He swore to your fathers to give you."

The choice of *Ekev* to mean "because" is problematic, at first glance. There are many other words in Hebrew to denote the word because. Furthermore, the text could have simply stated: "If (or when) you will listen etc."

Some commentators translate the word *Ekev* here as "in the end," meaning that in the end—before the coming of Moshiach—you will listen. However, it could have used more common words for "the end," such as *Miketz*.

A third interpretation is based on the translation of the word *Ekev* as a heel. Thus the Torah says: When your awareness of, and commitment to G-d, permeates your entire being, until it reaches your very heel, then G-d will keep His promise.

Intertwining Translations

How do we combine all of these translations/interpretations of the word *Ekev*? a-"Because"; b-"In the end of days"; c-"When your devotion reaches the heel"?

Instead of looking at history as a conglomeration of loosely connected events, the Torah views all of history as one organic unit that consists of a head, heart and all the organs—vital and otherwise—of a body, down to the lowly heel.

Kabbalah (See Tanya Chapter two) teaches us that the Patriarchs, Moses and the other progenitors of the Jewish people were the heads of all subsequent generations. Other great leaders paralleled the heart and other vital organs of the body, without which we could have not survived as a vibrant nation, with a mission and purpose.

These greats, from Abraham and Moses, through Kings David and Solomon, the Prophets and Talmudic Sages, were the heads, hearts and nerve centers of the Jewish continuum of history.

By contrast, the most recent generations

including our own, represent the tail-end of history, its "heel."

Most Important Mission

And while it may seem that by designating our generation as a "heel" in comparison with the earlier ones, we are denigrating our generation and its accomplishments, Kabbalah teaches us that the opposite is the truth.

Our mission is by far the most important one, because our mission is to complete the journey of history and make the cosmic body complete. Our responsibility is to instill G-dly awareness into the entirety of our beings until it reaches the lowest aspects of our historical and national "anatomy"—our "heels." Reaching this "modest" goal brings about the end of days, the coming of Moshiach and the final Redemption.

Each "organ" of the "body" of history was charged with the responsibility of making that particular organ function to its full capacity. In addition, the "head" and "heart" generations were not only responsible for their own welfare, but they were also

responsible for directing, inspiring and energizing future generations. Without a healthy head and heart, the rest of the body including the heel cannot function well.

Moreover, the cumulative energy generated by our forebears never dissipated, but continues to be a source of inspiration and spiritual energy for us. Our ability to make the "heel" of history a holy heel, we get from the successful effects our ancestors had on the "head" and "heart" of history.

Why weren't You Zushe?"

Our generation, however, was not asked to act and be like a brain. Instead, we are asked to fulfill our mission as healthy "heels." As Rabbi Zushe, the famed Chasidic master, exclaimed that he was not concerned that he will be taken to task in the next world for not being like Moses, for he was not Moses. He was concerned that they will ask him why he was not Zushe, and for that he had no adequate reply.

We are Unique!

We can now understand the connection

between all the different interpretations and translations of the world Ekev. Why is it that G-d will keep His covenant with **us**? What makes **us** unique? It is because we are at the end of the continuum of history. We are the "heels" of creation and our task is to complete that which was prepared for us in the past. On a scale from 1 to a 100, Moses and our other forebears reached the number 99. Our task is to reach the 100 mark by extending their influence to the heels.

We are not expected to scale the greatest heights. We are asked to find ways of making even the quotidian aspects of life holy. Using modern technology to teach Torah and its timeless values is one way we bring G-d down to the heel. But, more generally, we distinguish ourselves, because despite the way we might have been downtrodden and reduced to a "heel" in the physical sense, we still remain faithful to G-d. And despite the many assaults that were launched against Judaism and morality to the point that our spiritual level is that of a heel, we still have not lost our connection to Torah. This is bringing G-d down to the heel.

Moses may have been denied entry then,

because Moses was a head without its heel. In our generation, Moses **will** be granted entry into the Promised Land, vicariously, through his influence on us, the "heel" generation. And according to the Midrash, Moses will personally return to lead his generation—the generation that perished in the desert—into the Promised Land.

ESSAY THREE

THE SOUL OF THE HEEL

Relationships that are quid-pro-quo are fine.

Relationships that are unconditional are Divine.

ESSAY THREE

THE SOUL OF THE HEEL

Multiple Translations

A heel is the lowest part of the body and it is also the name of this week's Parsha, depending on how you translate the word *Ekev*.

The Parsha begins with the words:

> "And it will be, because (*Ekev*) you will listen to these judgments and guard and keep them, thus, G-d your G-d shall keep His covenant, and His kindness that He has sworn to your fathers."

The word *Ekev* here is translated as "because". However, there are many more common words that could have been used for the word because. Why did the Torah use the word *Ekev*, which also has the meaning of a heel?

Rashi, in anticipation of this question, proceeds to give the answer that the Torah here is referring specifically to those

commandments that people tread upon with their heels; i.e., those commandments that are considered to be trivial in nature and therefore neglected.

One may ask why is G-d's promise to keep His covenant with us dependent on the observance of these "heel" commandments?

Two Approaches to Mitzvos

There are two basic approaches to the observance of the Mitzvos that parallel two components of each and every Mitzvah. One is the fact that a Mitzvah is G-d's commandment to us.

The second component of the Mitzvah is its ability to make a difference in our lives. From this perspective, each and every Mitzvah is unique, because each Mitzvah has a specialized effect on our souls and the world around us.

The first component, the commandment aspect of a Mitzvah, however, transcends the specific characteristics and functions of the Mitzvah. From the perspective of the Divine Commander, we are expected to do the Mitzvah simply because it is

His will. From this perspective there can be no difference between a "weighty" Mitzvah, one that contributes heavily to the individual and society and a "light" or "heel" mitzvah, one that only has a marginal, or, even no perceived, effect.

Marriage Metaphor

To help understand this often misunderstood aspect of Judaism — devotion to G-d's commandments in a way that transcends our appreciation and understanding of the Mitzvah, the metaphor of marriage is often given in Jewish sources.

In a marriage, there are aspects of the relationship that serve a utilitarian function. We do certain things for one another because they have an intended objective. We give our time, money and other resources to our spouse because there are needs that must be fulfilled.

But, that is not the main reason for responding to the "demands" of the other spouse. In a relationship, especially in a marriage, there is a need to transcend the utilitarian and functional aspect of the

relationship, and uncover the soul of the relationship.

We do things for one another in a marriage because this is how we connect to the essence and soul of the other, not because there is any particular benefit that accrues to one of the partners.

Reciprocal Relationship

In our relationship with G-d, which has been likened to a marriage by our Sages, we must, first and foremost, focus on the relationship itself. If our Divine Partner asks of us to keep Kosher, for instance, we do so primarily because it is what our "Partner" asks of us. By complying with G-d's wish we connect to Him.

Indeed, one of the meanings of the word Mitzvah (besides commandment) is "connection." And while we might not know the actual benefit that accrues to us by following this or any other Mitzvah, its benefit pales in comparison with realization that we have just connected to the very essence of G-d.

By keeping even those Mitzvos that people

tread upon with their heels, because they do not appear to have much utilitarian use, we demonstrate that our relationship is not quid pro quo and contractual, but covenantal. Our commitment is not predicated on what is in it for me, but on how it contributes to my "marriage" to G-d.

Therefore, the Torah states, when one observes these, the "heel" commandments, G-d will keep His **covenant**. He will show us how His relationship with us is also a covenantal one.

Connection to the "End (Heel) Days."

The word *Ekev* also means "at the end" and is interpreted by our Sages to be referring to the "end of days," or the Messianic Age.

There is a definite connection between the Mitzvos that are referred to as "heels" and the coming of Moshiach. Our Sages have likened the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai to the betrothal of the Jewish people to G-d and the coming of Moshiach to the actual Marriage.

One of the ways to indicate that we are ready for marriage is to show our willingness to

observe even, nay, especially, those Mitzvos that are designated as the "heel" ones. This indicates that we are prepared to put our Spouse's needs first.

When we fathom the "soul" of the "heel," we will have discovered the essence of Judaism and the soul of our marriage and covenant with G-d.

ESSAY FOUR

MODERNITY

You can follow all the most recent fads and be old-fashioned.

And you can follow the ancient teachings of Torah and be truly modern.

ESSAY FOUR

MODERNITY

Listen you shall Listen

One of the most oft recited selections from the Torah appears in this week's parsha. It begins with the words:

> "And it will come to pass if you will diligently obey My Commandments which I command you this day, to love G-d your G-d and to serve Him will all your heart and with all you soul, I will give..."

These words are recited at least twice daily, as the second paragraph of the *Shema*. This fact attests to the centrality of this selection to our lives. It is thus certain that it contains an invaluable lesson for us. And if this is true with regard to the entire paragraph it is even more so with respect to its opening words, for the opening words set the tone and convey the spirit of that which follows.

If we were to translate these opening words literally, it would read as follows: "And it will come to pass, if **listen** you shall **listen** to My commandments."

Rashi addresses the repetition of the word "listen" in this verse and explains that it is meant to convey the following message:

> "If you will listen with respect to old matters, you will also listen with regard to new matters."

Anxiety

One of the great challenges of modernity is the fast pace of change that punctuates our lives. No sooner do we get used to one fad, fashion, technology, political situation, et al. we discover that it is already outdated and we must move on to another level and another experience.

In short, we are always challenged to be on our toes and rarely do we have a moment to catch our breath.

It is no wonder that our generation suffers from so much anxiety. We are overwhelmed by the avalanche of new developments in our lives. We cannot keep up with the demand they make on us. Twenty four hours a day, one can be in touch with literally the whole world. So instead of having to deal with the pressures of life in one place within a

prescribed period of time, we are exposed to the entire world at all times.

You Hear but You Don't Listen!

As a result of the anxiety we suffer from, our senses are dulled and we are incapable of listening. People can talk to us, and we can hear what they say, but we don't listen.

It is no wonder that our inability to communicate has been implicated as one of the most significant contributors to the breakdown in our relationships. In order to communicate to another person, we have to first hear and listen to what they have to say to us.

When Moses addressed the Jewish people as they are about to enter into the Promised Land, he was well aware of the challenges they will confront. He knew that it will be very difficult for them to "listen." Moses already had the experience of talking to the Jews when they were slaves in Egypt and they didn't listen because they were overwhelmed by their workload.

In the future ("It will come to pass"), Moses realized, the Jewish people will suffer from

the same inability to listen, but for the opposite reason. In Egypt, they were subjected to slavery. Life was slow paced, boring and virtually no changes. The same dreary day they had yesterday was repeated today. It was the brutal fashion with which they were treated that dulled their senses.

By contrast, in the future, Moses prophesied, the problem of apathy in the Jewish community, the breakdown of communication, will come as a result of having too many changes in their lives.

How do we cope with this problem?

The So[u]lution

Moses then continues: If you have a problem with "listening" in the modern age, the answer is to listen with regard to "old matters." In order to cope with modernity we have to let ourselves open up and become receptive to the "old fashioned" teachings of the Torah. For Torah is not only the compilation of Divine wisdom that teaches us right from wrong, it is also the ultimate source of stability, comfort and clarity that exists. The teachings of the Torah resonate in

our soul, and our soul never gets bored or distracted. With Torah we have a so[u]lution!

When one is receptive to and "listens" to the old Torah in the new times, one does not have to give up modernity. On the contrary, it enables us to truly enjoy it. What pleasure can one derive from modern life if it just causes anxiety and depression?

To live in the modern world, one must be anchored to the old world, which, in truth, is not old, but timeless. What G-d gave us at Sinai, 3300 years ago was meant for all times, since G-d Himself is obviously beyond the constraints of time, so too, His commandments.

Nothing to Fear about Moshiach

When discussing the coming of Moshiach and the future Redemption, there are some who are intimidated by the prospects of having to give up modern life.

Nothing can be further from the truth. The Messianic Age will introduce us to the timeless nature of Torah in the most complete way. As such, we will not have any of the anxieties that plague us in the present

day and age. All of the influences that prevent us from truly enjoying the good things we have in life will disappear.

In the present day and age, living in Galus-exile, we can suffer from cognitive dissonance. We can study Torah and still not feel the anxiety ridding power contained in Torah. In the Messianic Age, we will be able to reap all of Torah's benefits, specifically living an anxiety free life.

ESSAY FIVE

HOME SWEET HOME

Poverty constricts, constrains and stifles.

Wealth and abundance causes fragmentation, lack of peace and tranquility.

The Mezuzah is the unifying cure that permits us to enjoy what we have with serenity.

ESSAY FIVE

HOME SWEET HOME

Not Just Jewish Pride

One of the most conspicuous Jewish symbols is the Mezuzah we place on each door post of our homes, in accordance with the Biblical commandment that appears once in last week's parsha and again in this week's parsha.

To many, the Mezuzah is a symbol of one's identification with the Jewish people. A Mezuzah is our way of declaring, "I am proud to be a Jew!"

There is, however, more to the Mezuzah than just Jewish pride. In this message we will explore some of the teachings and ideals conveyed by the Mezuzah.

The Spiritual Thermometer

Everyone heard the joke about the Jew who put on Tefillin (a related mitzvah that is mentioned in this week's Torah portion as well) on his first day stay in the hospital. The

person who shared the room with him remarked, "These Jews are brilliant. He's here only one day and he can take his own blood-pressure..."

Well, there is a similar humorous Mezuzah anecdote concerning a non-Jewish immigrant looking for employment as a domestic in a Jewish neighborhood. A more experienced friend offered the following advice: "Try to get a job in those homes where there is a thermometer on their door posts, they treat their employees well..."

A Mezuzah is, in a certain sense, a thermometer, that gauges the degree of Jewish awareness and spiritual warmth of a home.

A mezuzah, which contains the *shema* proclaims G-d's unity not only in the abstract theological sense, but also on a very down-to-earth physical and material sense. Even our home – and all that goes on within the home – is permeated with a sense of meaning. Placement of a Mezuzah on our homes or on rooms within our homes is our way of saying to G-d: "You are cordially invited to dwell in our midst." A home that has a Mezuzah is one in which everything revolves around G-d.

In addition, the Mezuzah – with its message of unity – also contributes to the tranquility of the home and instills a unified sense of purposefulness in all the multi-faceted functions of a home.

A home can have multiple functions; the kitchen for cocking, the dining room for eating, the office for work, the living room for socializing with guests, the family room for leisure, the bedrooms for sleeping, etc.

A story is told of a poor Jew visiting a rich compatriot. Upon entering the home, the rich man attempted to impress his visitor with the opulence of his home. The poor man was unimpressed. Moreover he expressed his sympathy for the rich man who had so many rooms for so many purposes. "Poor guy, you are so fragmented, not knowing where you belong..."

The Mezuzah enables us to find comfort and peace within the message and atmosphere of unity it imparts.

Unity within Marriage

The area where unity is most needed is within the institution of marriage. According

to our sages, the Mezuzah contributes to peace and harmony in the marriage as well.

A Mezuzah consists of the two words, *zu* and *zeh*. Both words mean "this one," the former being in the feminine form and the latter in the masculine. These words are used in the traditional engagement agreement wherein it is stated that the two marriage partners will not withhold anything from each other: "lo **zu m'zeh** v'lo **zeh mizu."** Literally translated, the words mean, "Not this (feminine) from this (masculine) and not this (m) from this (f)," but the word Mezuzah is thinly veiled in these words, showing that it is the source of this mutual understanding that makes a marriage work**.** The Mezuzah, thus, introduces peace and harmony within the marriage.

A marriage brings together two disparate individuals, with separate and sometimes opposite personalities, desires and goals. When there is a G-dly presence in their home – represented and generated by the Mezuzah – these two forces can be synthesized and form the basis for dynamic growth. If, G-d forbid, there is a lack of that G-dly presence, the two powerful forces possessed by man

and woman are likely to clash and lead to disastrous results. The Mezuzah is thus the unifying factor within our homes and families.

The Paradoxical Mezuzah

There is, however, a paradoxically reverse role the Mezuzah plays. It also has the capacity to separate between that which is ours and that which is someone else's. The Mezuzah teaches us to respect the privacy and the rights of others. .

According to the Jerusalem Talmud, the Ten Commandments are alluded to in the three paragraphs of the Shema. The Mitzvah of Mezuzah, contained within the Shema, corresponds to the tenth commandment: "You shall not covet." This correlation is based on the Torah's statement, "And you shall write them on the door posts of **your** home.." The emphasis of "**your** home" is to exclude the home of another.

When a person has the sense that one's home and property are a gift from G-d and were given to him for a specific purpose, it is easy to respect the boundaries G-d set up between

individuals' possessions. The Mezuzah draws the line, "everything inside this house is mine and it is my obligation to dedicate it to G-d, while everything outside this house is 'out of bounds,' beyond my reach."

Paving the way for Moshiach

So important are these two messages of the Mezuzah (that of unity and respect for others) that they are reflected in the very last paragraph of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah (the most comprehensive code of Jewish law) that describes the state of the world will be in when Moshiach comes: '

"In that era, there will be neither famine or war, **envy or rivalry** (read: everyone will respect others and their belongings)... the occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d (i.e., the primary message of Mezuzah)."

The reason we will respect each other's privacy and never allow even our thoughts to encroach on someone else's property is because the world will have one metaphoric Mezuzah at its gates.

ESSAY SIX

NO FAST FOOD

Food is a metaphor for spiritual nourishment.

However, food itself contains a spiritual dimension.

It is just as important to insure that that which comes **into** our mouth is as pure as that which comes **out** of our mouth.

Reciting the Grace after Meal insures that we capture the spirt of the food and the food of the spirit.

ESSAY SIX

NO FAST FOOD

Food is Serious Business

Eating is one of the most important aspects of life. The food industry is one of the most pervasive influences in our lives. One of the most popular forms of food consumption is "fast food," which allows a person to get his food, eat it and be off to the next thing as quickly as possible.

Yes Esau, the man who symbolized brute force and uncouthness, is credited with "fast food" when he gulped down the lentils he bought for his birthright. The Torah describes his meal as: "He ate and he drank, he arose and left. Esau disgraced the birthright."

Judaism, however, does not have a concept of "fast food." Eating is serious business, as the commandment to bless G-d after eating, that we read about in this week's parsha, attests.

Interestingly, the only place where the Torah requires that we recite a blessing is after a person eats his meal. All other traditional

blessings, including the one to bless G-d **before** we eat, were mandated by the rabbis.

Where's the Manna?

How many people spend any time thinking why did G-d create a world in which a human being would have to ingest other lower forms of existence such as minerals, plant life and animals, for survival? Wouldn't it have been more "logical" for G-d to have given us "manna" from heaven?

The answer, provided, by the great kabbalist, the Arizal, is that every piece of food contains hidden "sparks" of holiness. This spiritual energy engendered by eating physical food is more potent than the spiritual energy we can access from spiritual experiences.

This, the Arizal, based on a principle of Kabbalah that the "higher something is the lower it falls." The most sublime G-dly light can be found in the lowliest aspects of life.

To underscore the material and spiritual significance of the culinary experience, the Torah commands us to recite the *Birkat Hamazon*, or the Grace After Meals, that comprises four separate blessings.

Grace after Meals: Part One-Manna from Heaven

The first blessing "*Hazan es Ha-olam*-Who sustains the world," our sages tell us, was instituted by Moses, to thank G-d for the Manna that descended from heaven.

This blessing is intended to teach us that all our food is the equivalent with Manna from heaven.

Notwithstanding all of our efforts to produce this food, we have to realize that it is in essence Manna from heaven. Without G-d's blessing there would be no food.

The story is told of the great Chassidic Master, Reb Zushe who had an attendant who used to bring him his breakfast daily. Each and every time Reb Zushe would sit down to eat he would address G-d by saying "Zushe is hungry" and would then recite the blessing and eat the food.

The attendant was upset that Reb Zushe made it sound that G-d was directly responsible for his food. He decided to leave now food for Reb Zushe the next day. "Let me see G-d give him food tomorrow," he said.

That day Reb Zushe was walking in the street

and some rich man decided to have fun at Reb Zushe's expense and pushed him into the mud when he was walking on a precarious log.

Onlookers were aghast and told him that the man he pushed into the mud was a saintly man. The rich man decided to mollify Reb Zushe and delivered him a lavish breakfast the next day...

Grace after Meals: Part Two-Bread from Earth

The second blessing "*Nodeh lecha*-We thank you," our sages further inform us was enacted by Joshua, when the Land of Israel was conquered and settled by the Jewish people. This teaches us that it does not suffice to thank G-d for the food alone; one must also express gratitude for the ability to grow our own food, by having access to the land.

Notwithstanding the superior quality of Manna that descended from heaven that had no undesirable parts to it, we are nevertheless, grateful to G-d for giving us the "lower grade" food — Bread of the Earth.

The advantage that this bread has over the Manna is twofold:

Firstly: according to the aforementioned teaching of the Arizal, that the "higher something is the lower it falls," it follows that the spiritual energy that comes from the earth is actually more potent than the spiritual energy that comes from the heavens.

Secondly, the Talmud states that "A person prefers one small measure of his own than a much greater measure that one can get from others."

Thus, the second part of the *Birkas Hamazon* is our way of expressing gratitude to G-d for giving us the opportunity to expend our own efforts in sustaining life.

Indeed, Judaism is based on the belief that G-d created the world for us so that we will enhance the world, fix the world and ultimately bring the world to a state of perfection in the Messianic Era. But, we cannot reach that objective with just G-d given energies. It is crucial that we invest our own efforts in the performance of Mitzvos to make the changes occur.

To use a culinary metaphor, there are no

"fast food" establishments in Jewish life. Everything must come with effort.

Grace after Meals: Part Three-Temple and Davidic Dynasty

This may explain why the third component of the *Birkat Hamazon* speaks of the building of the Temple and the Davidic dynasty.

In order to reach the desired goal of bringing Moshiach who will build the Temple that epitomizes the state of perfection that will ultimately prevail, we must first "cultivate the land," i.e., expend our own energies in making the world an ideal place.

Grace after Meals: Part Four-Gratitude for Little things

The fourth blessing, "*Hatov V'Hameitiv*" was composed as a result of the amelioration of the horrific conditions that prevailed shortly after the destruction of the city of Beitar. After destroying Beitar on Tisha B'Av, the Romans did not initially allow the Jews to bury the dead. Finally, on the fifteenth of Av, they relented. Miraculously, the bodies did not decay.

For this double kindness — that the bodies did not decay and the opportunity to bury their dead — the Rabbis instituted the fourth blessing of *Birkat Hamazon*.

This blessing is a vivid reminder, that even as we wait for the Redemption to occur, we must be grateful for all the "little" things and "minor" changes for the good that we experience now in the time of exile, because they represent the seeds that will lead to the blossoming of an age when we will be able to thank G-d for complete, unmitigated, goodness that we will experience.

ESSAY SEVEN

SEEING IS ENJOYING

Light is the physical world's most ethereal phenomenon.

Yet light enhances our physical lives even as it is the ultimate metaphor for spirituality.

ESSAY SEVEN

SEEING IS ENJOYING

Lighting Shabbos Candles

Lighting candles before Shabbos is one of the practices instituted by the rabbis. But even rabbinical enactments, we are taught, are hinted in the Torah. One of the many places where the Torah alludes to this very special Mitzvah is in this week's Torah portion.

Moses recounts the experiences the Jews had in the desert. When describing the Manna that fell miraculously from heaven, the Torah states:

> "Who fed you Manna in the desert... in order to afflict you."

The Midrash comments that from this verse we can derive the obligation to light the Shabbos candles!

At first glance, there seems to be no relationship between eating of the Manna in the desert and the need to light candles before the onset of the Shabbos. How does the Midrash connect these two matters?

Who Afflicted You

To shed some light (pun intended) on this enigmatic Midrash, we must understand the Biblical verse itself. The obvious question that arises here is how can living off the Manna be described as a form of affliction? Particularly, considering what our sages tell us that when eating the Manna they would experience any taste that they desired. It was the ultimate gourmet experience!

The Talmud (Yoma 74b) provides two answers to this question.

> "One cannot compare one who has bread in his basket to the one who does not have bread in his basket."

Rashi explains that this means that one, who is worried about the source of his food for the next day, does not fully enjoy his food. The anxiety that goes along with uncertainty detracts from the pleasure one would have experienced otherwise

The second answer is:

> "One cannot compare the one who sees what he eats to the one who does not see what he eats."

Rashi explains that notwithstanding the fact

that when they ate the Manna, they could experience any taste that they chose, they could not **see** the food that they tasted and were denied the true pleasure that comes from eating gourmet food.

In light (pun intended) of the foregoing Talmudic explanation we can now resolve the riddle cited above: How does the Midrash derives the obligation to light Shabbos candles from the Torah's description of the Manna as a form of affliction?

Purpose for Shabbos Candles

One of the reasons for lighting Shabbos candles is to enhance the joy and pleasure of Shabbos. If we did not have light while eating our Shabbos meal, we would not fully appreciate the taste of the food. Our *Oneg Shabbos*-joy of the Shabbos would be compromised because of the foregoing principle that is derived from the Torah's description of Manna as a form of affliction, that "one cannot compare the one who sees what he eats to the one who cannot see what he eats."

Hence the Torah's description of Manna as

affliction underscores the importance of illuminating our homes while attempting to enjoy our Shabbos repast.

Peace and Honor

In addition to the enhancement of Shabbos joy, there are two other reasons cited for lighting the Shabbos candles.

Lighting candles is our way of according honor to the Shabbos.

Light also ensures *Shalom Bayit*-peace in the home. Without light, people might "stumble over wood or stone," thereby disrupting the tranquil and serene atmosphere of the Shabbos.

Hence the three reason for Shabbos candles are: delight, honor and peace.

Foretaste

Our sages have also taught that the Shabbos candles are a foretaste of the light that we will experience in the future Messianic Era.

Life now in exile is compared to night and darkness, while the Era that will be ushered

in by Moshiach is compared to light and day.

By lighting the Shabbos candles before the Shabbos we are given the opportunity to relish some of the features that will become standard fare for the future Age of Redemption.

Three Distinctions

There are three salient distinctions between the present era of exile and the future Era of Redemption that parallel the three reasons for lighting the Shabbos candles: Joy, honor and peace.

Firstly, we now live in an age when we cannot fully appreciate and enjoy even the good things in life. The uncertainty about the future and other factors, make it hard for us to see the good that exists. It is much easier for us to see the negatives that beset us than the good. The Age of Redemption is an Age when we will be able to see clearly and therefore fully appreciate the good that we have.

Secondly, during the present day and age, we do not fully appreciate the Divine character of everything. G-d is hidden and His presence

eludes us most of the time. We cannot therefore sufficiently accord G-d the recognition and honor He deserves.

When we light the candles to honor the Shabbos it is acknowledgement that the Shabbos is a holy day permeated with the presence of G-d. Similarly, during the Messianic Age we will gain an awareness of G-d whose presence will no longer be concealed as it is now, during the period of exile.

A third function of living in exile is that there are all sorts of obstacles that disrupt the state of peace between us and G-d. "Stumbling over wood and stone" are metaphors for the worshipping of materialism — a modern form of idolatry — that pervades our society.

By lighting the Shabbos candles we usher in a day that portends the removal of the obstacles that create disharmony between G-d and the Jewish people, and by extension, the entire world. In the future Shabbos-existence of the world we will be able to clearly see and avoid those things which could cause us to stumble. This, in turn, will enable us to see G-d and each other more clearly and will enhance the spirit of peace

and love between one another and between ourselves and our G-d.

One way of hastening that age is by performing the Mitzvah of lighting Shabbos and Holiday candles.

ESSAY EIGHT

LONGEVITY

Israel exists on two planes: Geographic and Spiritual.

The Mezuzah affixed to our homes creates virtual Israel

ESSAY EIGHT

LONGEVITY

What's Wrong with Living Long?

One of the issues confronting society of late is the morality of stem-cell research. We will not get into this controversial subject, except to note one aspect of the debate. According to the proponents of this research, one of the potential benefits is that we will be able to replace failing and ailing organs and thereby guarantee longevity, perhaps even immortality.

While there are genuine questions about the propriety of this cutting edge research, the fear that humans will enjoy greater longevity and perhaps even immortality, ought not to be an impediment to this area of scientific endeavor.

Humankind's Most Natural State

On the contrary, according to Jewish belief, death came upon the world as a result of

Adam and Eve eating of the forbidden fruit. Had they not violated the command not to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, they would have lived forever.

In other words, humankinds most natural state — before it degraded itself — was to enjoy immortality.

Thus, in the Messianic Age, after thousands of years of cumulative good that has brought G-dly energy into the world, the process of death will be reversed. Death will ultimately be conquered, as many Biblical verses affirm.

The fact that humankind can even theorize about immortality is a sign that we are living in exciting and momentous times, on the very threshold of the Messianic Age when the theory will become a reality — with or without stem-cell research.

But Judaism has also taught us that whatever G-d gives us as a gift, we must try to earn by our own efforts in the same direction. Notwithstanding the fact that longevity has been promised to us for the future, we ought to prepare for the future by introducing elements of it — to the extent that we are capable of — into our lives.

Mezuzah: The Key to Longevity

The key to longevity is actually mentioned in this week's Parsha, Ekev. For following His commandments, specifically Mezuzah, G-d has promised us:

> "...that your days shall be multiplied and the days of your children, upon the land which G-d swore unto your fathers to give them..."

The Mitzvah is one of the Mitzvos singled out for long life.

Longevity in Israel and in the Diaspora

Elsewhere in the Talmud it records yet another prescription for long life: The Talmud relates that the Israeli Sage, Rabbi Yochanan's was amazed when he heard there were old men in Babylonia:

> "Doesn't the Torah state "your days shall be multiplied and the days of your children, upon the land?"

Rabbi Yochanan was incredulous at the prospects of people who do not live in the actual Land of Israel to enjoy the blessing of longevity?

When Rabbi Yochanan was told that the people in Babylonia attend the House of Study early in the morning and remain there late at night, he understood how they could live long.

What is the meaning of the association of longevity with living in the Land of Israel and how does attending the House of Study early in the morning and late at night compensate for living there?

Two Israels

To be sure, the importance and holiness ascribed to the Land of Israel applies literally to the geographic Land of Israel. For thousands of years, Jews have prayed for their ability to return to the Land of Israel. However, there is also a metaphoric sense of the Land of Israel, which can apply wherever we are situated. Indeed, our challenge here is to create the spiritual environment of Israel, wherever we may be.

Rabbi Yochanan knew that the curse given to Adam and Eve, i.e., that their bodies should not enjoy the immortality of the soul, could be removed somewhat by living in the Holy

Land of Israel, where even the physical landscape is imbued with the Divine presence. And while the curse of mortality could not be removed until Moshiach arrives, it was ameliorated, upon the Jewish people's entry into the Land of Israel, allowing for the blessing of longevity.

The Talmud, however, concludes that we can create this Divine atmosphere wherever there is a House of Study that is devoted to Torah study. In such an environment one can sense the G-dly atmosphere that is reminiscent of Israel.

But, even frequenting a House of Study does not alone suffice for guaranteeing longevity; we must make Torah study the first and last part of our day. Torah study, even if it is for a few minutes a day, is most potent in terms of affecting our lives, when it occurs at the very beginning of one's day — setting the tone for the entire day — and at the very end of the day, thereby sealing it and one's entire being with the energizing vitality of Torah.

The Embassy

We must still understand why, of all Mitzvos does the Mezuzah have the capacity to insure long life.

Upon some reflection it is clear that the Mezuzah which we place at the entrance of our homes and rooms defines one's home as an embassy for the Land of Israel. Just as in international law, an embassy is sovereign property of that country, so too our homes become extensions of Israel and are endowed with the power to lengthen our lives.

However, as long as we are in exile, the power of living in Israel and the Mitzvah of Mezuzah everywhere is limited. In the Messianic Age it will guarantee eternal life.

Preparing for the Mezuzah of the Future

This may explain a comment of Rashi that we should affix Mezuzos and wear Tefillin now so that we will not be new when Moshiach comes.

The question can be asked, why Rashi—based on the text of the Torah which juxtaposes these two Mitzvos with longevity on the land—singles out these two Mitzvos? Aren't all Mitzvos we do today preparations

for their ideal performance in the future?

Tefillin, we can understand, is a unique prelude to Moshiach because Tefillin are a sign of freedom and royalty. One acts royally in preparation for assuming a regal position in the future. But, why Mezuzah?

In light of the above it is clear.

Longevity is a product of Israel and Mezuzah renders a home an extension of Israel. By performing this Mitzvah today we pave the way for experiencing the full power of longevity associated with the Land of Israel.

ESSAY NINE

JEWISH PRIDE

. The immature always underestimate their potential.

Maturity is appreciating your regal nature.

A Bar Mitzvah begins wearing Tefillin, the symbol of Maturity and royalty.

ESSAY NINE

JEWISH PRIDE

Bar Mitzvah and Tefillin

A Bar Mitzvah is when a Jew becomes and adult and becomes obligated, for the first time, to observe all of the Mitzvos. A boy becomes Bar Mitzvah at the age of 13 while a girl attains adulthood and becomes a become Bas Mitzvah at the age of twelve.

There is, however, a special connection between a Bar Mitzvah and one mitzvah in particular: The mitzvah of Tefillin, mentioned in this week's Torah portion, Ekev.

(The reason women are exempted from this observance is discussed in the last chapter of my book "Tefillin: The Ultimate Mitzvah.")

Unlike other Mitzvos, such as *Tzitzis* (fringes) and reciting the prayers, a child does not observe the mitzvah of Tefillin until he reaches the age of Bar Mitzvah. The obligation to educate one's child applies to virtually every other Mitzvah but not to Tefillin.

Why?

The simple reason for this is that since the Tefillin boxes contain Biblical scrolls with numerous citations of G-d's name, they are considered holy objects, much like a Torah Scroll, in contradistinction to the *Tzitzis* which are "merely" Mitzvah objects, but not holy objects.

Wearing Tefillin requires maintaining a clean body and a pure mind. One must be aware of the fact that he is wearing Tefillin and not engage in any idle chatter and frivolous behavior.

One must, therefore, be fully mature before they can be entrusted with the responsibility of wearing the Tefillin

Why the Repetition?

To better appreciate the significance of Tefillin, we should refer to the fact that the obligation to put on the Tefillin has already been mentioned in last week's Torah portion of *Vo'eschanan*. What is the reason for the repetition?

Likewise, every day we read the Shema which contains both the selection from last week's

Torah reading as well as this week's. Why do we have to mention the Mitzvah of Tefillin twice every day?

Tefillin for Days of Exile

The answer lies in the words the Torah uses before commanding us to put on the Tefillin:

> "And you shall place these words on your hearts and souls."

Rashi tells us that this instruction was intended for the days of exile. Even then, the Torah wants us to continue wearing the Tefillin so that we should be familiar with this mitzvah when we return from exile.

In other words, the Mitzvah of Tefillin that we observe now is to prepare us for our observance of Mitzvos when the Redemption takes place.

When we wear the Tefillin, we are demonstrating openly our love for Hashem and our pride in being Jewish. The Tefillin - particularly, the head Tefillin - are compared to a crown. Tefillin are a source of dignity and royalty. Tefillin, therefore, prepare us for

the time of Redemption when our lives will be entirely free, dignified and regal.

Wearing Tefillin is like saying, "I am truly free."

Dual Nature of Tefillin

The Torah, therefore, repeats the commandment of Tefillin to underscore the dual nature of Tefillin:

Tefillin are, on one hand, an independent mitzvah. We wear Tefillin as our way of affirming our belief in G-d's unity and expressing our love for him. This is what the first reference to Tefillin in the Shema, is all about. In the first paragraph of the Shema Tefillin are mentioned after the commandment to know that G-d is one and the obligation to love Him with all our heart, life and might.

The reference to Tefillin in this week's Torah portion (and in the second paragraph of the Shema) is independent of the need to affirm G-d's unity and our love for Him. It is mentioned after the predictions of what could happen to us in exile. As Rashi stated it was

intended for us under these exile conditions, as mentioned above.

In this section it is an expression of our inner freedom, even as we are in exile. It is this taste of freedom which prepares us for the future Redemption, when we will be fully liberated.

The Mitzvah of Maturity for the Mature Preparing for the Age of Maturity

We can now understand why maturity is needed for Tefillin in particular. Since Tefillin is the mark of royalty, we must be at the level of understanding where we can appreciate its significance and wear it with dignity and reverence.

Exile is a period of immaturity. We still have a lack of understanding of G-d's role in our lives. In order to prepare for the age of Maturity, the age of collective Bar Mitzvah, we must have at least, one Mitzvah, which anticipates the mature state of the period of Redemption. This is the Mitzvah of Tefillin.

It would not make sense to perform the Mitzvah of maturity with a child who lacks

that characteristic. It would hardly serve as a preparation for the age of maturity.

We now have a more mature understanding of the importance of this Mitzvah. Among all the other incredible things our Sages have said about Tefillin, including the statement of the Jerusalem Talmud that "it is the greatest Mitzvah," it is the Mitzvah of the future par excellence.

ESSAY TEN
A BAR MITZVAH SPEECH

ESSAY TEN

A BAR MITZVAH SPEECH

Which came first the chicken or the egg? Another way of asking the question is which comes first the Bar Mitzvah or the party and celebration. Do we celebrate because of the boy becoming a Bar Mitzvah? Or did he become a Bar Mitzvah because we all wanted to celebrate?

This is not such a difficult question to answer. In the Torah portion we just read, the answer was given.

The Torah describes the Jewish people in the desert and how they matured.

First, Moses tells the Jews, "You should know in your heart that just as a person disciplines his son, so too G-d your G-d, will discipline you."

In this verse Moses is comparing the Jews' in the desert to the pre-Bar Mitzvah child whose parents are responsible for his behavior.

The Torah then continues: "You should keep the commandments of G-d, your G-d..." Now Moses is stressing that now **"You** should keep the commandments," on your own. You no longer ought to depend on your parents holding you by your hand to make the right moral choices in your life.

This is precisely what a Bar Mitzvah is all about. It is when a boy becomes independently responsible to keep all the commandments.

The Torah then follows this with the promise of great rewards and great food that will follow: In other words, **after** the Bar Mitzvah, we celebrate and party.

But it doesn't end with the party.

The Torah continues that when you finish partaking of G-d's beautiful and bountiful world—when the party is over—we must express gratitude to G-d. The Torah states in the very last verse that I just read: "And you shall eat, you shall be satisfied and you shall bless G-d your G-d."

This commandment establishes the need for us to show gratitude to others for all the blessings we receive.

Immediately after the conclusion of today's reading the Torah speaks about the need to guard ourselves from the negative influences.

This reminds us of the Rebbe's message from sports. One of the positions in many different ball games is the role of keeping the ball from the "other" team and thereby preventing them from scoring.

There is a moral and spiritual lesson in this game that a Bar Mitzvah boy must learn from this aspect of sports.

The world is round like a ball. The ball, or globe, is given to each one of us, as the Talmud tells us that each person should say, "The world was created for my sake." The purpose of life is to bring the globe into G-d's net.

However, in G-d's plan there is an opposing team that challenges us at every opportunity. In the same way that the Jew wants to put the "ball" in G-d's court, so too the negative forces have their own plans to put it in the opposite side.

However, it is specifically the threat posed by this opponent that charges the Jew with the motivation to win. The desire for victory

pushes us to reach much deeper within ourselves and discover our hidden potential.

As in sport, in life one cannot move sluggishly. We must keep moving with vitality. This is achieved not just with our brain and heart but with the action of our feet. Only by means of putting our Jewish learning into vigorous practice can we hope to emerge victorious in our quest to put the "ball" or the world in G-d's domain.

A Bar Mitzvah is the day from which a boy draws inspiration to serve as G-d's defense team to do his share in keeping the "ball" i.e., the world —which includes the miniature world—from falling into the hands of the wrong side.

Ultimately this will lead us to the victory we have been praying for, for thousands of years: to bring Moshiach who will usher in the Messianic Age when we will have universal peace and goodness. From this point onward, every Mitzvah the Bar Mitzvah boy will now do has that much more power to make that happen sooner.

ESSAY ELEVEN

WHAT'S THE QUESTION?

Jews are known to ask a lot of questions.

Jews are also known to answer questions with other questions.

Why are we so obsessed with questions?

Because questions touch raw nerves and produce better results than mere statements!

ESSAY ELEVEN

WHAT'S THE QUESTION?

Question or Statement?

In Moses' parting monologue recorded in this week's parsha, he declares:

> "And now Israel what does G-d your G-d require of you but to fear G-d your G-d."

The commentaries on the Torah ask: Couldn't Moses have simply stated: "G-d requires of you to fear G-d..." Why did Moses introduce his rendition of G-d's request of them to fear G-d in the manner of a question: "What does G-d ask of you?"

Several explanations for the usage of the question and answer format have been advanced by our Sages.

Emulate G-d

One explanation asserts that the word "what" is not used here as a question but as a declarative statement: "What G-d your G-d is," i.e., what He represents and performs

Himself, “He requests of you.” This means that the Torah wants us to know that G-d wants us to emulate His attributes and practices.

This echoes the statement of the Talmud on the verse, "G-d, your G-d, shall you follow." The Talmud asks,

> "How is it possible for a human being to follow G-d of whom it is said, 'For G-d, your G-d, is a consuming fire"?

The Talmud answers that the Torah means that one should emulate G-d’s attributes:

> "Just as He performs acts of kindness, so shall you; He clothes the naked, visits the sick, and buries the dead, so shall you."

This explanation is also an echo of the Midrash that states that everything G-d does Himself He asks of us. G-d does not ask us to do anything that He Himself does not do.

The obvious question that this explanation raises is how can G-d fulfill the Mitzvah to fear G-d?

One may suggest that just as G-d’s Tefillin contain references to the uniqueness of the Jewish people which parallels our Tefillin

which contain the reference to G-d's unity, so too G-d has respect and reverence for the Jewish people.

Socratic or Talmudic Method?

In addition to the foregoing explanation, an additional explanation can be suggested that dissects the anatomy of asking questions.

A question is often employed as an educational device that stimulates the student. Sometimes the question is so powerful that it can jolt us out of our reverie. We can be wide awake, but our minds are asleep. We can hear words of wisdom and inspiration, yet we do not pay attention to the message that they convey until someone throws a question at us and forces us to deal with the issue at hand.

This approach, which many identify as the Socratic Method, is actually very much part of the Talmudic method, which has its roots in Biblical literature way before Socrates lived.

If Moses would have merely stated: "G-d requires of you etc.," it would simply have

been filed into the "storage room" of their minds.

By prefacing this important message with a question, "What does G-d your G-d require of you, etc.," it grabbed their attention and opened up their minds and hearts to His message.

A question is like a dam that obstructs the path of the water. When enough water accumulates, the pressure eventually will break down the dam, and the water will flow with such force that nothing can stand its way.

Similarly, a question is a dam that temporarily causes our thoughts to stand still. Eventually the force of the question will opens up the floodgates of our minds and hearts.

A More Pressing Question that has Yet to be Answered

There is another question—one that is recorded in the Prophetic writings—that we ask of G-d, especially these days: "*Ad masai*- How much longer?" How much longer do we have to remain in exile? How much longer do

we have to suffer? When will the Moshiach usher in the age of Redemption and bring true and enduring peace to the world?

The fact that we ask, nay demand of G-d to bring us Redemption, rather than just pray for it in a more casual fashion, such as by saying softly, "Please bring us Moshiach and Redemption" is to cause our question to jolt us and all of the spiritual worlds to awaken from our Galus caused reverie.

Awakening G-d??

Indeed, the question and demand is intended for G-d for even He is described in the book of Psalms as "being asleep" when King David asks: "Awaken, **why** do you sleep O G-d."

G-d's sleep is obviously meant, metaphorically, as G-d putting Himself in a state of concealment, when He withdraws His revealed presence (*Shechinah)* from our world.

When we declare and ask, "How much longer?" and similar jolting expressions, it empowers us (by G-d's own design and choice, of course) to "awaken" G-d, as it were,

and bring Him into the world's consciousness. This amounts to Redemption.

The cumulative weight of our heartfelt prayer/question, "How much longer?" and accompanying entreaties will ultimately break through the dam—we call Galus-exile—and bring about the answer only G-d can give us.

ESSAY TWELVE

Life is defined by its ability to reproduce.

Our future life as a people hinges on our ability to retain our identities in a sea of other cultures.

ESSAY TWELVE

NO STERILE BLESSINGS

Blessed *Above* or *By* the Nations

Among the various blessings the Torah records in this week's parsha we find the following:

> "You will be blessed above all nations. There will not be male or female barren among you or among your cattle."

This literal translation implies that the blessing is that we will be raised above other nations.

According to the Talmud, however, the translation of this verse is: "You will be blessed **by** the nations."

From this verse the Jerusalem Talmud states we derive that when a non-Jew blesses a Jew we should answer, "Amen!"

Commentators have sought to understand the connection between the two apparently disparate themes mentioned in the foregoing

verse: to be blessed above or by the nations and not being sterile.

[See the following essay for a Chassidic approach to this matter].

A Tightrope Act

On a simple level one can explain the connection the following way:

The Jewish nation was always a nation that lived among other nations. This is especially true since the days we were exiled to the four corners of the earth. But even when we lived in the Land of Israel—in the days of King Solomon—there was always interaction between Israel and the other nations.

If life itself is a balancing act, then the way we live amongst and interact with other nations is certainly a tightrope act.

Put simply: The perennial dilemma for the Jewish people—who are Biblically characterized as the "smallest of all the nations"—is how do we maintain a healthy relationship with these nations and not lose out on our own identities?

In other words, how do we enjoy the benefits and blessings that we receive from other nations and not lose our ability to transmit our Jewish identities to our progeny?

And because it is such a daunting challenge, which most people would have maintained is impossible to achieve, the Torah therefore declares: "You will be blessed by all the nations." You will live amongst the other nations and be subjected to the pressures of assimilation. And yet, despite your association with them, there will not be any barren people among you. You will succeed in reproducing a new generation of Jews for whom Judaism is vibrant.

The Key To Survival in a Non-Jewish World

The follow up question is how does one accomplish this? How can we live, as a minority, amongst foreign cultures and not be heavily influenced by them? How can a Jew be secure that his or her Jewish identity will be bequeathed to the next generation? And if there is a way where does the Torah suggest this approach?

The answer lies in the very way the Torah formulates the dilemma: "You will be blessed by all the nations."

Why do the nations of the world bless the Jewish people? We are blessed by them because they see that we are proud of who we are. Jews are respected when they do not hide their Jewish-ness, Moreover, we are loved and blessed by others when we become "a light to the nations."

To be sure, being a light to the nations does not mean—and it never did despite the assertion of some historians to the contrary—that we ought to seek to convert everyone to Judaism. Rather it means that our own commitment to the Torah and its ideals radiates such light that it inspires all of humanity to be better people.

The Seven Noahide Commandments: The Original Religion

More specifically it refers to the Jewish obligation, as Maimonides puts it, to influence all of humankind to follow the universal religion, the Seven Noahide

commandments, that forms the bedrock of a G-d driven civilized world.

These seven commandments (not to: worship idols, blaspheme G-d, murder, rob, commit sexual crimes, eat an animal without killing it and the obligation to establishing a judiciary) were given originally to Noah to pass on to his progeny. These commandments were subsequently reiterated by G-d at Sinai, when He gave the Torah and the 613 commandments to the Jewish people.

When a human being who is not Jewish follows these seven commandments because they were given by G-d at Sinai, he or she becomes part of G-d's covenant He made with the Jewish people at Sinai, and thereby forms an eternal bond with G-d. One, therefore, does not have to convert to Judaism to enjoy a relationship with G-d and to receive reward in the world-to-come.

The Reason for Anti-Semitism

Theories about the phenomenon of anti-Semitism abound. And there are certainly many factors that contribute to it. One view that "explains" certain forms of anti-Semitism

derives from the impression of the anti-Semite that the Jewish people are out of form when they fail to be the purveyors of light to the rest of the world. Instead of showing the way to get closer to G-d, many Jews have tried to prove to the nations that they are a no different from them. Jews, tragically, will bask in the light of the nations, learning from their cultures, and even adopting their life styles as well as their thought processes, instead of bringing some of the light of Judaism to the nations.

While we receive from the nations, we forget about our role as those who must shine the light of G-d and Torah to the entire world.

On a conscious level, the anti-Semite may see this attitude as pandering or even trespassing on his turf. On a sub-conscious level the anti-Semite is angry that he or she has been cheated out of the light that the Jew was entrusted with and charged with the responsibility to share it with the rest of the world.

When Jews do their thing—serve as beacons of light, by proudly observing their commandments and living their lives with integrity—they generally will evoke feelings

of respect and admiration from the nations of the world, except, of course, from the hard-core haters.

This then may be the intent of the verse "You shall be blessed by all the nations." G-d in effect tells us that when you act in ways that all the nations bless you because of what they feel they receive from you, you will not only not be influenced negatively by your association with them, but, on the contrary. you will influence them for the good and thereby reinforce your own Jewish life; passing it on to the next generation, ad infinitum.

Redefining our Relationships in the Messianic Age

As we have mentioned countless times, we are situated on the threshold of the Messianic Age. In these last days of exile—when we are "guests" in the midst of other nations—our greatest challenge is to redefine our relationship with the other nations of the world.

This indeed is what the world is waiting for. Instead of becoming sponges to pick up every

nuance of popular culture we ought to become steeped in our own Torah "culture" and use it to benefit the world, the very reason we exist as a people and are situated in their midst.

Our role now is not just to reverse the process of assimilation, but to give off some of our light so that all the nations will bask in it and bless us for it.

Maimonides Placement of Noahide Laws

This explains why Maimonides included the laws of the seven Noahide commandments right before he discusses the laws concerning the Moshiach. One of the preparations for Moshiach and the final Redemption is to serve as beacons of light to the nations. Moshiach will complete the process of bringing light to the nations and we will then see the fulfillment of the Biblical prophecy that all the nations of the world will be united as one in their service of G-d.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE CURE FOR STERILITY

A sterile mind is cannot produce proper emotions.

It is a sign of exile.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE CURE FOR STERILITY

An Unusual Blessing

In the beginning of this week's parsha the Torah lists the following among the blessings the Jewish people will enjoy when they follow in G-d's ways:

> "You shall be blessed above all nations. There will be no sterile male or barren female among you or among your cattle."

The question has been raised, what is the connection between the two parts of this verse? What does our status as a blessed nation have to do with getting rid of sterility and barrenness?

[See preceding essay for a simple explanation.]

Chochma and Binah: Father and Mother

Sterility and barrenness are not just physical phenomena. They are also symbols of spiritual maladies that inhibit the growth of

Jewish life and that have punctuated our lives particularly in the days of exile.

In the teachings of Kabbalah the male reproductive power is said to parallel the intellectual creative power referred to as *chochma*, usually translated as "wisdom" but more accurately the "power of conceptualization."

When a person has a flash of insight and "sees" the answer to a question, the power of *chochma* is at work.

However, *chochma* alone does not suffice, for that flash of insight is very much like a flash of lightening. It illuminates the entire sky ever so brightly, but it lasts only for a few seconds.

To fully access knowledge one must be able to have the next intellectual power of *binah*.

Female reproductive power, which involves the development of the male seed, is said to correspond to the intellectual power of *binah*-understanding, or the elucidation and development of the seminal idea.

With the feminine power of *binah* one can take any idea and flesh out all of its details, delve deeply into the subject to uncover its

various layers of meaning and then be capable of transmitting it to another.

SpiritualSterility

The human mind is capable—through the process of conceptualization and elucidation—to develop the requisite emotions of love and awe for G-d.

This is true, however, only when the mind thinks clearly. When one is intoxicated with materialistic matters, the synapses of the brain do not function properly. When one's mind is not receptive to the soul's message because it has been starved of the necessary spiritual oxygen supplied by the study of Torah and the observance of the Mitzvos, the mind's capacity to conceive of G-d and elaborate on His role in our lives is curtailed.

When the mind's ability to conceive of spiritual matters is inhibited, or is incapable of developing and implementing that which one conceives us, the result is "sterility" and "barrenness." There will be no offspring; no resulting emotions; no warmth or excitement about anything spiritual.

When a person prays and the words are charged with feeling and fervor they can change a person's behavior. When, however, there is no feeling, and the words are recited perfunctorily, they become sterile and barren.

A New Translation

This then is what the Torah means when it says "You shall be blessed above all the nations." This verse can also be translated as: You shall be blessed **by** all the nations." This suggests that our minds and hearts will be so virile and potent and we will be so spiritually influential, that the nations around us will bless us because of the overflow of holiness and goodness that we exude and they will enjoy.

Concerning the Messianic Age we are told (Tanya, Chapter 36):

> "From the overflow of light to the Jewish people the darkness of the nations will also be illuminated, as it is stated, 'And the nations will go with your light...'"

In that case there will be no one who is spiritually sterile or barren, because our efforts will have borne fruit. Our actions will

be so radiant that it will even effect our environment. The effects of our actions will extend even to "your animals," i.e., even in those mundane aspects of life that we share with animals, we will feel the inspiration of our Mitzvos.

Igniting the Embers

The Chassidic master, R. Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov in his work *Igra d'Kalah* takes this notion a step further:

The Hebrew word for nation is *ahm* in the singular and *ah'mim* in the plural. This word can also be translated as "embers." When a burning coal loses its light and the fire is smoldering to the point that it is barely alive that is the definition of *ah'mim*.

This then, on a deeper level, is what the Torah means when it says that we will be blessed above the nations (read "embers."): We will be blessed that our embers will again come alive, and the flame of our souls will burn brightly. The heat and energy that they will generate will guarantee that they will not be sterile or barren; their efforts will make a difference. These "flames" will engulf the

entirety of our beings. Even our animal souls will begin to warm up to G-d and even develop a passion for the noble things in life.

Connection to the Beginning

This verse is the continuation of the opening verse:

> "And what will happen is, as a result of your listening to these laws and your care of their observance, G-d your G-d, will keep to you; the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your fathers."

The opening word and title of this week's parsha is *Ekev*, which is translated here to mean as "a result" can also be translated as "heel" or "the end of days."

In this context, we can reinterpret the above as follows:

In the Messianic Age, after maintaining our Jewish identity, notwithstanding the millennia of suffering and pain in exile, and notwithstanding the state of spiritual sterility and barrenness that has threatened to frustrate the conception and birth of Jewish life, G-d will finally fan the flames of our

dormant embers so that we will never be sterile or barren again.

Thus the prophet Isaiah declares: Says G-d: "You were like a barren woman who never gave birth, sing!" As commentators explain, the barren woman refers to the state of the Jewish people in the days of exile, and that we will finally sing in the days of Moshiach when the cure for sterility and barrenness will finally be here.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

GETTING RID OF THE MONSTER WE CREATED

Some forms of fear can be paralyzing.

However, some forms of fear can be positive.

They can actually neutralize the negative forms of fear.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

GETTING RID OF THE MONSTER WE CREATED

Why the Fear?

In the beginning of this week's parsha G-d allays the fears of the Israelites of the many nations they will confront when they enter into, conquer and inherit the Promised Land.

> "If you shall say in your heart, 'These nations are more numerous than us! How will we be able to drive them out?' Do not fear them! You should always remember what G-d, your G-d, did to Pharaoh and to the whole of Egypt: the great proofs your eyes saw, the signs, and the wonders, and the mighty hand and the outstretched arm with which G-d your G-d took you out. So will G-d your G-d do to all of the nations that you fear."

The question can be raised, why should the Jews express fear at this juncture? Wasn't it quite obvious that G-d' assistance made their

minority status irrelevant? Haven't they seen all the great wonders of the wars they fought just days, weeks and months earlier; the war against Sichon, Og and the Midianites?

Second, if G-d's intention was to quell their anxiety why did He have to respond to their fears by way of a question, "If you shall say in your heart?" The Torah should have simply stated: "Do not fear the nations etc."

Third, why does the Torah stress that "if you shall say in your heart?" If "in your heart" means "If you shall fear," let it say that! If, on the other hand it means literally, "if you shall express this fear," then it was not just in their hearts, it would also be on their lips. It should therefore have stated, "If you shall say…"

Fighting Fear with Trust

The second question is answered in the Chassidic work "*Igra d'kallah.*" His answer and novel interpretation of this verse can perhaps help to remove the other two questions as well.

But first a brief introduction is in order:

There are two reasons that people fear their enemy.

The first and most common is that it is human nature to be intimidated or outright terrified when one confronts a formidable foe that wishes or has the potential to destroy you. When a hungry alligator comes towards you, you are overcome with fear. When a terrorist threatens people, they are naturally instilled with fear. No amount of bravery will help to allay the fear. Only someone who has a weapon that can neutralize the threat can remain calm and confident of survival.

In other words, fear that is brought on by an external threat can be removed when one is equipped with the right weapon.

The most effective way of allaying our natural fears and anxieties is to recognize that we are in G-d's hands and we can place our trust in Him regardless of the extent of the threat.

Of course, we must also avail ourselves of the natural instruments that can protect us; but knowing that it is ultimately G-d's power that makes these natural instruments effective.

This meditation is an especially effective therapy if one realizes that the external

threats that have engendered the fear were placed there by G-d as a test of our trust in Him.

A More Sophisticated Fear

There is however a more sophisticated form of fear that appears to be impervious to the remedy that we have for the first form.

This is the fear that we experience when we realize that the enemy that threatens us was created by us. We have created the monster by our own sins and shortcomings.

And this form of fear, *Igra d'kallah* maintains, is what the Torah addresses here. It was not the first natural sense of fear that G-d was trying to treat. That fear has already been discussed in earlier sections of the Torah and the Jews who were poised to enter the Promised Land after forty years in the desert were well aware of.

However, with this verse the Torah opens a new chapter in the world of fear and anxiety. It is the fear that is generated when a person reflects on how their own iniquity served as a catalyst that created so many enemies and monsters.

If G-d were to have placed obstacles before us, we can reason, that there is no basis for concern, because the obstacle is a test that G-d obviously knows we can pass. All we have to do is approach the obstacle as a challenge that was meant by the Divine Challenger to overcome by recognizing that G-d is on our side and that the challenge and the means to overcome the challenge come from the same Divine source. The more we reflect on the source of the challenge, the more we realize that it is only a façade; the obstacle is not real.

When, however, we—and not G-d—create the obstacle because **we** failed in our mission, we may take this as a sign that we have abandoned G-d's protective cover and that the formidable and foreboding challenge is an insurmountable one; not just a mirage and a test.

How could we overcome an obstacle that **we** created because we "drove" G-d out of our lives and dug our own grave? How can we rely on Him to get us out of the rut when it was not Him that got us into it?

This gnawing question and fear is what the Torah addresses here.

Rephrasing of the Text

Let us now rephrase the Biblical text:

"If you shall say in your heart 'these nations are more numerous than us [*mimeni*]!'" Instead of translating the word "*mimeni*" as "than us", it can be translated as "from me." The reason why there are so many nations (read: hostile forces that seek to destroy us and who enjoy a numerical advantage over us) is due to the fact that **we** created them; they come from us. Their superiority is not natural; it is a product of our own devices. Why are these nations more numerous? Because of us!

The strength of these nations, we may think, does not come from G-d, but generated solely by our own weaknesses and transgressions. How then, we can justifiably ask, can we possibly drive away these negative forces?

The Cure is Within the Malady

The answer is that this very heartfelt feeling of helplessness due to one's sins and the remorse we feel in the depths of our heart ("If you shall say in your heart") is the force that obliterates the negative forces we

created. This feeling of remorse that emanates from our heart constitutes the very power to remove the threat from all the negative forces that we may have been responsible for their existence.

When a person expresses heartfelt Teshuvah (repentance) and returns to G-d by showing remorse for their past errant behavior, that uproots the energy that was generated by our sins.

Thus the Torah says (not, "**If** you shall say in your heart..." but "**When** you say in your heart... do not fear them." If your Teshuvah is sincere, that sincere expression of contrition is itself the reason why you no longer have to fear. The fear is what gets rid of the cause of the fear!

A Follow-up Question

But the Torah continues:

> "You should always remember what G-d your G-d, did to Pharaoh and to the whole of Egypt: the great proofs your eyes saw, the signs, and the wonders, and the mighty hand and the outstretched arm with which G-d your

> G-d took you out. So will G-d your G-d do to all of the nations that you fear."

This additional response, according to *Igra d'kallah*, was intended as a rejoinder to a follow up question the person who expresses remorse might raise:

"True, I did Teshuvah, but I am devoid of any Mitzvos. While I might be able to erase the past, what have I to show for myself, that I should deserve to be saved from the threatening forces that I created with my sins?"

The Response

To respond to this new concern that we lack adequate Mitzvos, the Torah continues with the description of how G-d took us out of Egypt. When we left Egypt, our Sages tell us that we were spiritually "naked." Yet, despite that, G-d redeemed us, and so He will redeem us, not only from the exile **He** imposed on us, but even from the exile mentality and mindset that **we** created.

On a deeper level it can be said that when one changes their exile mindset, that itself serves as the catalyst to perform the Mitzvos.

Lack of performance of the Mitzvos can come from two sources: One is the natural inclination that G-d planted in us for us to overcome. Or it can come from our own stubborn insistence on maintaining an "exile mindset" that stifles our spiritual creativity and stamina. Thus the result is that we become lax in our observance.

Once we correct our own imposed exile mentality we open ourselves up to the G-dly force that will ultimately take us out of all forms of exile: the exile G-d created and the exile that we create.

It is crucial that we recognize that the exile that we created is neutralized the moment we realize that we created it and that it is an aberration and we are sorry we created it. This realization can be expressed in many ways. One way it is dramatically expressed is when we pray for the Redemption or study the Torah's teachings about Moshiach and Redemption. These exercises remove the grip exile forces have on us.

On the Threshold

The Rebbe (whose father's Yahrtzeit we our observing this Shabbos the 20th of Av), informed us unequivocally that we are living on the threshold of the Messianic Era. And all that we have to do is open our eyes to this new reality and prepare ourselves and our communities for the arrival of Moshiach by increasing in acts of goodness and kindness, along with all the other Mitzvos and study of Torah.

Perhaps, the Rebbe was saying that the G-dly imposed exile conditions have been, for all intents and purposes, removed. What is left is for us to remove is the cover on our own eyes.

The Rebbe exhorted us to not stubbornly insist that we are products of exile.

Our mission is to come to the realization that our exile mentality is self-imposed. The moment we "upon our eyes" to this realization, we will be well on our way on the road to the Promised Land with the actual Redemption through Moshiach.

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ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE "OLIVE JEW" AND THE "EGG JEW"

There is food for the body and foo for the soul.

Chassidus teaches us that food for the body can also be food for the soul.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE "OLIVE JEW" AND THE "EGG JEW"

Thanking Before and After

This week's parsha is known specifically for the commandment to recite *BirKas Hamazon*, the Grace after Meals. The Torah expresses this commandment succinctly:

> "And you shall eat, and you shall be satisfied and you will bless G-d."

The wording of the Torah makes it clear that the obligation to recite this blessing is only if one has been satiated by eating the food. If one were to just nibble or snack, there would be no obligation to recite the *Birkas Hamazon.*

To be sure, there is a rabbinical obligation to recite a blessing **prior** to partaking of any amount of food. In the words of the Talmud: "It is forbidden to derive any benefit from this world without first blessing G-d." One may not partake of G-d's resources without first acknowledging that we are guests sitting at His table, as it were, and partaking of His

food. However, the blessing we recite **after** a meal takes the expression of our gratitude to the next level. We must thank G-d for providing us with an ample supply of food.

In other words, the blessing before eating is akin to asking permission to partake of His food—in any amount—the blessing after eating is to thank Him for being satiated by the food.

Showing Favoritism

The Talmud cites the verse: "May G-d show you His shining countenance." The Hebrew term employed here suggests that G-d showers special blessings on the Jewish people and shows them favoritism, which prompts the Talmud's rhetorical question: "Is it fair for G-d to show favoritism to the Jewish people?" The Talmud's answer is: "How can I not show favoritism to them who are strict and recite the grace after meals even if they eat only a *kizayis*—the size of an olive—or *kibeitzah*—the size of an egg."

In other words, while the Torah obligates us to recite the *Birkas Hamazon* only if we have eaten our fill, the Jewish people act more

stringently and go beyond the law. They recite this blessing even if they eat no more than an olive's worth or an egg's worth.

The question has been raised, why is it praiseworthy to recite this blessing when the Torah clearly does not obligate it? One may not recite a blessing which contains a mention of G-d's name if one is not obligated to do so. It is akin to taking G-d's name in vain! Why then is it praiseworthy to recite the Grace after Meals even when eating less than the prescribed amount?

Another question has been advanced. An egg is larger than an olive. If indeed it is praiseworthy to thank G-d for smaller amounts it should have reversed the order. It should have stated that we are deserving of favoritism because we bless G-d even when eating the amount of an egg, or even a smaller amount—the size of an olive. Instead it says that we recite the *Birkas Hamazon* even if we eat an olive's worth (the smaller amount) and even if we eat the size of an egg (the larger amount)!

Man Does Not Live by Bread Alone

One way of answering both questions is to reflect on the entire function of eating as a way of surviving. What is the ultimate reason we depend on food for life? Why would G-d create us in a way that forces us to depend on lower forms of life?

According to the great Kabbalist, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, known as the Arizal, we do not really live by eating physical food. We live by eating the food that contains within it Divine "sparks" of energy that nourish the soul. And when the soul is sated, it feels "comfortable" residing within the physical body and we continue to live and thrive physically as well.

This, the Arizal explains is what the Biblical phrase, "man does not live by bread alone, but by the word of G-d does man live." Man does not live by consuming the physical bread but by the Divine force that gives life to that bread that is contained within the bread.

When we are more spiritually oriented we can more easily access and internalize the spiritual energy that is embedded within the food that we ingest. Once we feel the

spiritual energy's effects on us we no longer feel hungry. We are satisfied.

Even a Reduced Amount Satisfies the Soul

This then is the praise of the Jewish people and for which they deserve "preferential" treatment. They recite the Grace after Meals even when they eat the small amount equivalent to an olive or an egg. By reciting the blessing—which is usually reserved for one who is satiated—even after eating only the small amount of an olive or an egg it is a sign that even this reduced amount has accomplished its goal of satisfying one's hunger for the spiritual energy. It is indicative of a heightened spiritual sensitivity that provides for satisfaction with much less eating. In effect, the person who recites the *Birkas Hamazon* for the small amounts is indeed satisfied and is mandated to recite this blessing.

Two Levels of Spirituality: Egg and Olive

However, within this heightened level of spirituality—where less is more—there are two levels:

There are those who can extract, digest and absorb the spiritual energy by eating only the small amount of food equivalent to an olive. And then there are others who need the relatively larger size of an egg before they can harness the G-dly vitality contained within the food.

Hence the Talmud states: Look how special we are! We can feel satisfied even with the minuscule amount of food equivalent to an olive. But even if we are not on that level we still deserve praise because we are satisfied with the amount equivalent to an egg. This "egg Jew," while not as sophisticated as the "olive Jew"—inasmuch as it take him longer to discover and internalize the G-dly energy within the food—is nonetheless deserving of much credit and adulation.

The Crushed Olive and The Hard Boiled Egg

At this point we ought to ponder the difference between the "olive Jew" and the "egg Jew," and how they relate to us today.

The olive is seen as the symbol of spiritual light because it is the source of olive oil which is the source of light. In Chassidic

literature, water, wine and olive oil are seen as metaphors for the Torah. Water is the metaphor for the basic teachings of Jewish law that guides our day to day life. Without that knowledge we cannot survive.

Wine, which has the capacity to "loosen us up" and may cause us to divulge matters that we kept secret, is symbolic of the spiritual and esoteric teachings of Torah. Thus, the Talmud tells us that the word for wine in Hebrew—Yayin—and the word for secret—sod—are both numerically the same. They both add up to the number 70.

If wine represents the inner dimension and secrets of the Torah, what does olive oil represent?

The answer is that olive oil represents the "secrets of the secrets," the most unknowable aspects of Torah that will only be revealed in the Messianic Era. And just as the olive does not produce the oil with mere squeezing, it requires crushing, so too, we have been told, the future Messianic secrets will come after we have endured the painful and crushing period of exile.

Hence, even if we are not so spiritual, the mere fact that we—as a people—have been

so crushed throughout our long exile means that we—whether we recognize it or not—are spiritually sophisticated. And we are indeed deserving of the final Redemption through Moshiach when we will all recite the ultimate and consummate Grace after Meal.

The "Banquet of Exile"

Life has been compared to a banquet and we have had a fill of the "banquet" of exile. We have had our equivalent of the crushed "olive" and are ready to bask in the light of the oil that we have produced by virtue of the way we were crushed in exile.

However, not everyone has undergone the brutal and crushing effects of exile as did the Jews of the Holocaust and of countless other tragedies in our history. Perhaps they are not as "sophisticated" as the "olive Jews" but nevertheless they still deserve to recite the final blessing after the "banquet" of exile because they are like the egg. The egg, the food we eat on Passover and is therefore associated with liberation, is a unique food for the longer you cook it the harder it gets.

Just by virtue of our long stay in exile—even in the most benign of conditions such as that which we are enjoying today living in a free country where Judaism can thrive and where we enjoy the blessing of prosperity—we have become hardened. As the saying goes, "when the going gets tough, the tough get going."

We have been hardened—in a positive way. We have withstood the centuries and millennia of exile. And contrary to those amongst us who see the current generation of Jews as inferior to the earlier ones, we have been going tough, and that toughness has enabled us to be more spiritually sensitive than many of our forebears.

So whether we are "olive Jews" or just "egg Jews", we are more than satiated and content (excuse the pun: and "fed up") with the challenges posed by exile. We are ready for pronouncing the final blessing on the banquet of exile as we enter into the feast of the Messianic Age, imminently!

ESSAY SIXTEEN

TORAH STUDY: THE JEWISH SYNTHESIZER

One of the greatest challenges is confronting ecil. Another great challenge is finding the right balance between two good things.

Torah is the ideal power of synthesis and balance.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

TORAH STUDY: THE JEWISH SYNTHESIZER

Fraternal Twins

One of Judaism's central prayers is the Shema, which consists of three paragraphs. The first paragraph that begins with the immortal words Shema Yisroel, Hear O Israel, was read last week as part of the weekly Torah portion. This week we read the second paragraph, which begins with the words: "And it will come to pass that you will listen to My commandments etc.

Upon close examination of these two paragraphs we realize that there are many similarities in them as well as significant differences. They can be compared to fraternal twins.

Both of these paragraphs command us to love G-d, study Torah, put on Tefillin and affix Mezuzot to our doorposts. They differ, however, in several ways.

The Order

One of these differences relates to the order of three of the commandments that are mentioned in both paragraphs:

In the first paragraph the Torah speaks first of the commandment to teach Torah to our children, followed by the Mitzvah to place the Tefillin on our arm and head, and then the Mitzvah of affixing the Mezuzah to our doorposts.

In the second paragraph, the order is inverted: First, the Mitzvah of Tefillin, then teaching Torah to our children and then Mezuzah.

Why is the Mitzvah of teaching Torah preface Tefillin and Mezuzah in the first paragraph, while it is sandwiched in between Tefillin and Mezuzah in the second?

The Dual Function of Jewish Education

The answer relates to the role of teaching Torah to our children and Torah study in general. A Jewish education, synonymous with a Torah education, serves two functions:

It is the very foundation of our Jewish life. If one wants the ideals and values of Judaism to permeate our mind, heart and actions, symbolized by and expressed through the Mitzvah of Tefillin, we must give our children a Torah based education and study Torah ourselves.

If we want the values and ideals of Judaism affect the atmosphere of our home and by extension our community and then the rest of the world, symbolized and expressed through the Mitzvah of Mezuzah, we must teach Torah to our children and learn Torah in that home and community.

Thus, in the first paragraph, the Mitzvah of Torah study is mentioned as a preface to and foundation for the other Mitzvos.

In the second paragraph, however, Torah study is inserted between the Mitzvos of Tefillin and Mezuzah. Tefillin (both head and hand Tefillin) represent an obligation that is personal and internal, as it involves placing boxes with scrolls on our heads and arms. The goal and objective of Tefillin thus is to introduce the idea of G-dly unity and love into one's consciousness.

Mezuzah, by contrast, represents an obligation that is objective and external, as we place it on the doorposts of our homes and cities. It is our way of taking the beliefs and ideals of the Divine and projecting them outwards.

Torah Study: The Glue

To go from the internalization process represented by Tefillin to the externalization process represented by Mezuzah is a process that is extremely challenging and daunting. It can be compared to a person who is expected to be simultaneously introverted and extroverted, or, at the least, to alternate from moving inward to moving outward.

How does a finite human being accomplish this "feat?"

The answer is Torah study. Torah is the glue that connects the internal and the external.

Torah, among its other properties, has the unique capacity to unify opposites. Since Torah is a G-dly wisdom, made accessible to the human mind by G-d, it enables us to encompass opposites.

Torah to Resolve the Contemporary Paradox

We are living in paradoxical times that pose new challenges for all of us. On the one hand, we are on the threshold of the Messianic Age, as has been declared by the greatest of our Jewish leaders in the past few decades, particularly the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who stated emphatically that the coming of Moshiach is imminent. We have seen some of the light and heard some of the echoes from the future in so many of the spectacular events that transpired within the last two decades.

And we are expected to internalize the unprecedented spiritual energies of the coming Messianic Age that will be punctuated with the Tefillin model of internalizing G-dly light into our minds, hearts and actions.

On the other hand, we are now going through an extremely difficult period, where evil, anti-Jewish forces threaten Israel and the entire civilized world.

And in spite of the imminence of the Messianic Age, we must still deal with the external, anti-Messianic forces that threaten our existence. We have to fight the

inhospitable atmosphere of the "street," be that the materialism, secularism and hedonism that prevails there, or/and the evil terrorist forces that threaten the Jewish people and humanity.

In short, we must go from the Tefillin model to the Mezuzah model and unify the two.

These paradoxes of modern life that have exacerbated in recent days can be extremely disconcerting to many. How do we make sense out of all these contradictions? And how do we combine to opposite attitudes in responding to these new challenges?

The answer is Torah study. Torah can unify opposites and mold our minds in a way that allows it to accommodate the internal and the external.

Emphasis on Torah Teachings of Geulah

More specifically, the answer is to study the teachings of Torah concerning the future Redemption. Because when we absorb the Torah's Redemptive perspective it enables us to think in a Redemptive fashion and to live our lives accordingly.

Obviously, Torah study must be accompanied with action on all levels and on all fronts. But, Torah study should be seen not as a merely a rich intellectual experience, which it is, but also the foundation of all of our Judaism, and the glue that keeps it all together. It is the catalyst that makes the imminent Redemption materialize.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

THE KOSHER COMPROMISE

Compromise is not necessarily a good word because it takes away from truth.

However, there are compromises that enable and empower us to reach that truth.

The placement of the Mezuzah embodies that compromise.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

THE KOSHER COMPROMISE

A Sign

One way that we can tell whose house is Jewish is to see if there is a Mezuzah— one of the many themes of this week's parsha— on the doorposts of their homes. However, as much as the Mezuzah provides the outsiders with information about the identity of those who reside in the house, the Mezuzah is also a sign and a guide to those who live in the house.

First and foremost, a Mezuzah—which contains the *Shema*, our affirmation of our belief in one G-d—is a constant reminder to us that there is one G-d, and all that goes on in the house revolves around the unifying spiritual and ethical teachings that derive from one G-d.

Vertical or Horizontal?

There is a dispute among the medieval legal authorities as to the proper way of affixing the Mezuzah to the doorpost. According to Rashi, the Mezuzah must be affixed vertically, standing upright. Sephardic Jews have generally adopted this opinion.

Other authorities maintain that the Mezuzah should be placed horizontally on the doorpost.

Resolution

Rabbi Moshe Isserlis, the foremost Ashkenazic authority of Jewish law proposed a compromise: The Mezuzah should be placed on a slant—with the Shema facing inside and the last line pointing outwards. This is the prevalent custom among Ashkenazic Jews.

This compromise is unusual, because it seems to satisfy neither opinion. When something lies diagonally, it is not horizontal or vertical. A more logical compromise would have required two *Mezuzot*, one vertical and one horizontal.

Whatever the legal resolution of this issue may be, there is an important lesson,

however, inherent in this compromise.

Marriage Compromise

There are some who say that the "compromise" on our doorposts signifies the need for compromise in a Jewish home between husband and wife.

The problem with this reconciliation is that the ideal marriage is where each spouse is willing to give the other 100 percent, not just fifty. A compromise where each one bends in the other's directions is, at best, a stop gap measure in an atmosphere of conflict, until the couple recognizes the true dynamic of marriage.

Heaven and Earth in the Mezuzah

Upon deeper reflection, one of the messages conveyed by the positioning of the Mezuzah relates to that which was stated that the top of the Mezuzah tilts inward, while the bottom line tilts outward.

The very first word of the Mezuzah is *Shema*. Our Sages have stated that the word Shema is an acronym for three Biblical words: "*s'u*

morom eineichem-Lift your eyes **heavenward."** The Mezuzah thus begins with a focus on heaven, that which is above us.

By contrast, the last word of the Mezuzah is the word: "*Ha'Aretz*-the **earth**."

There are two ways one can physically represent the relationship between heaven and earth: the vertical and horizontal approaches. The "vertical" approach—where the "heaven" is on top and "earth" is one the bottom— makes a clear distinction between the spiritual and the physical aspects of life. It is indicative of the absolute superiority of the spiritual over the physical.

In terms of personalities, it refers to the totally spiritual individual, whose Torah study, prayer and spiritual activities clearly dominate his day and life.

Not everyone can attain this level of spiritual dominance. The Torah provides for a second approach—the horizontal scheme—which sees that our task in life is to infuse the physical with spiritual vitality. This individual/approach devotes as much time to and expends as much energy for the routine activities that we normally associate with the

earth such as eating, sleeping and work, as he does with Torah and prayer.

Are We Closer to heaven or to Earth?

But even this individual—who justifiably devotes as much time and energy for the material aspects of life while infusing them with meaning and purpose— must recognize that the spiritual is truly closer to his/her heart and soul and defines his/her true essence.

This is represented by the top of the Mezuzah—the *Shema* and spiritual part—points towards the inside of our house, while the bottom of the Mezuzah—that which represents the physical—is closer to the outside.

Our home is where we are our natural selves, and it is what defines us. The fact that the *Shema* points inward, is a proof that we are essentially defined by our heavenly attributes. The earthly, no matter how much we've refined it, remains as something that we associate with the outside.

The compromise actually synthesizes the

advantages of both approaches. On the one hand, the Shema—-the focus on heaven—is actually higher than the word for earth. However, while the slant does not place the spiritual that much higher than the physical—as in the vertical approach—it nevertheless still gives pre-eminence to the spiritual.

Simultaneously, the fact that the Shema is tilted towards the inside, it leaves no room for error concerning what is our essence.

Our Spiritual Ideal Has Not Changed

As we regress in times of exile, we may not be able to maintain the sophistication of the "vertical" approach because we cannot maintain such an overtly spiritual demeanor at all times. However, because we are closer to Moshiach we can still maintain the proper balance—always giving precedence to our spiritual endeavors—while also making it clear where our loyalties really lie. This means that to the extent that we might have to emphasize our involvement in the physical arena, we still make it very clear—perhaps even more than in the olden days—that our

heart, soul and essence are in the right place.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

FORGETTING FORGETFULNESS

Forgetfulness is caused by negative energy associated with exile.

In the Messianic Age we will no longer need teachers and other memory devices to retain our knowledge.

Teachers will then serve a higher purpose.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

FORGETTING FORGETFULNESS

The "Separation" of Levi

In Moses' monologue that began at the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy and continues through this week's portion – Ekev – and beyond, he recounts the highlights of their journey from Egypt through their arriving at the Jordan River.

> "At that time (i.e. after the sin of the Golden Calf), G-d separated the tribe of Levi (who did not participate in the sin) to carry the ark of the testimony of G-d; to stand before G-d and serve Him, and to bless in His name, which continues to this day. Therefore, a Levite has no portion or inheritance (in the Land) with his brothers. G-d is his inheritance, as G-d your G-d told him."

Immediately after the "separation" and dedication of the tribe of Levi, the narrative

abruptly changes. Moses relates how he had "remained on the mountain for forty days and forty nights like the first days, for G-d listened to me also at that time and G-d did not wish to destroy you." This is a reference to his going on the mountain to procure G-d's forgiveness for the sin of the Golden Calf and replace the Tablets with the Ten Commandments that he shattered with a new set.

When we examine these passages it makes us wonder about the connection between these two narratives. What connection is there between the theme of how the tribe of Levi did not receive a portion of the land with the theme of Moses having to stay on Mount Sinai for another period of fort days and forty nights to receive the second set of tablets to replace the ones he had shattered?

No Need for Teachers

The Chassidic commentary *Arugas Habosem* answers this question by making reference to a Talmudic tradition that had the Jews not sinned with the Golden Calf, the phenomenon of forgetfulness would not have existed with respect to Torah knowledge. The

first set of tablets brought in their wake an attachment to Torah the extent that it would have been so ingrained and etched in their memories that a Jew would not have needed to be prodded regularly about its teachings since the would have the teachings of Torah fresh in their minds.

And thus it would not have become necessary to have the tribe of Levi become the teachers of Israel to guide the rest of the population, for Torah knowledge would have become a universal phenomenon.

The reason the tribe of Levi was separated from the rest of the community and did not receive a portion of the land is because they were compelled to spend their time teaching the rest of the population and would not have time to tend to their land.

Alternatively in order for them to not be subjected to forgetfulness they had to be preoccupied with Torah exclusively. Involvement in the mundane affairs of life would have distracted them from Torah knowledge and they too would have been vulnerable.

We can now understand the connection between the two narratives. Moses is trying

to convey what the effects of the Golden Calf were. Because this sin caused Moses to shatter the tablets, the people became spiritually and intellectually vulnerable; they would become prone to forgetfulness. As a consequence of this new situation, Moses explained, it has become necessary to deny the Levites a portion of the Land of Israel, and dedicate them to the cause of teaching the Torah to the people, who might otherwise allow their knowledge of Torah to be lost.

Back to The First Tablets Non-forgetfulness

This state of affairs that resulted from the sin of the Golden Calf will be reversed with the coming of Moshiach. Concerning this time the prophet Jeremiah declares:

> "...I will put My Torah in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their G-d and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, `Know the L-rd; for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, says the L-rd, for I will forgive their

> iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.'"

The prophet connects the lack of a need for a teacher with the elimination of sin. Sin is the cause of forgetfulness, as the sin of the Golden Calf and the resultant shattering of the tablets demonstrated. When the negative energies will be neutralized, we will no longer have to depend on teachers to keep us from forgetting.

Teachers Will Not be Collecting Unemployment

This does not mean that in the Messianic Age all teachers will disappear. Indeed, Maimonides writes that Moshiach himself will teach us Torah. Rather it means that the function of the teacher will change. A teacher's role will not be simply to remove the impediments to learning and serve as a remedy for the natural propensity to forget. All obstructions to knowledge will be gone and teachers will be able to devote their full attention to enhancing the depth and quality of our knowledge. New dimensions and vistas of Torah knowledge will be opened for us.

ESSAY NINETEEN
THE NON-BLESSING BLESSING

The word Jew derives from the word gratitude.

Gratitude is not just saying thank-you. It's about conceding the other's importance.

It is also acknowledging the other's role in your good fortune.

Gratitude is liberating and characterizes Moshiach and the Messianic Age.

ESSAY NINETEEN

THE NON-BLESSING BLESSING

Serving G-d with Food

Judaism is all-encompassing. The Torah provides us with guidance in all arenas of life. In that sense, Judaism is not a conventional religion, at least in the ordinary sense of the word, because it does not compartmentalize between the sacred and the profane.

In Judaism, there is no qualitative difference between deep meditative prayer and eating a snack. Both activities are addressed by the Torah. The same Torah that commands us to reflect on and know G-d, particularly at the time of prayer, also tells us to eat our food in a Torah-designated fashion. Our connection to G-d is strengthened no less by eating in the Torah way as it is by heartfelt prayer on Yom Kippur.

In addition to the dietary laws of Kashrus, the Torah—and the rabbinic laws that are extensions of the Torah— commands us to not eat even a crumb without first blessing

G-d. In addition, when finished with eating a meal that consisted of one or more ounces of bread, we are commanded to recite the *Birchas Hamazon*, as mentioned in this week's parsha: "And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless G-d your G-d."

The Talmud extends and generalizes this requirement for a blessing over a meal of bread to consuming any food or beverage. If one eats an olive-sized piece of cake, for example, he or she must recite a special blessing after consuming the cake. This blessing is referred to as *Al Hamichya*. Another blessing is recited after drinking wine or eating the five fruits associated with the Land of Israel (grapes, dates, figs, olives and pomegranates). All other foods (fish, meat, eggs, etc.) and beverages (including water, when drunk to quench thirst) require a generic blessing, called *Borei Nefashos*:

> "Blessed are you, G-D, our G-d, King of the Universe, Creator of numerous living things and what they lack, for all that He has created in order to sustain the life of every being. Blessed is [He Who] is the life of the worlds."

As we see, this generic blessing does not specify the type of food for which one is thanking G-d. It only refers to two general needs for which G-d provides: The things that we lack and the life-enhancing things that provide us with pleasure. As we shall see this lack of specificity plays a significant role in understanding the uniqueness of this blessing.

A Unique Blessing

The Talmud (Berachos 37a) makes a startling statement with respect to the *Borei Nefashos*. According to one view, one who eats rice does not recite the more detailed blessing of *Al Hamichya* but rather the generic *Borei Nefashos*. However, the way this latter blessing is characterized by the Talmud is rather puzzling. It is referred to as "*v'lo clum*- nothing!" In other words, as Rashi explains, relative to the more formal and lengthy blessing one recites after eating foods made from other grains (wheat, barley, oats, rye and spelt), the generic blessing of *Borei Nefashos* is regarded as "nothing."

The rather enigmatic "putting down" of this blessing is addressed by the Rashba (the

foremost 14th Century Jewish sage and leader) in his Responsa literature. He explains that this blessing is referred to as "nothing" due to its lack of specificity. One does not find any mention of the particular food that one has just consumed in this blessing. The generic nature of this blessing is in stark contrast to the detailed and individualized nature of the *Al Hamichya* blessing.

However, the Rashba's explanation also requires clarification. Why should the generic nature of this blessing reduce it to a nothing? And if it is indeed regarded as nothing, why did the Sages even bother to institute such a blessing? Why didn't they make it more specific?

Two Forms of Gratitude

Our first step toward an answer is to better understand the dynamic of gratitude, the underlying basis for these blessings. As we shall come to see, there are two forms of gratitude and the *Borei Nefashos* blessing actually reflects the deeper form of gratitude.

Most people recognize the need to show gratitude to G-d when they receive significant

blessings. However, when the blessings relate to things they deem "nothing" or unimportant, most people fail to express any gratitude.

Moreover, when one clearly recognizes and values the benefit received from G-d, he or she is quick to express gratitude for that particular item because of how it was enjoyed. When it comes to an item that is so commonplace or insignificant that it can, at least in our own minds, be lumped in with many other things, we often forget to thank G-d for this item.

It is precisely for this type of often overlooked benefit that our Sages instituted the *Borei Nefashos* blessing. Even when the benefit seems boring, routine or non-descript, one must still think G-d for it.

One might reasonably suggest that this form of blessing expresses the purest form of gratitude. Since all our blessings flow down from G-d, the "small" blessings are no less G-dly than the blessings we perceive as "big."

Yehudah: The Epitome of Gratitude

To elaborate, let us look at the first mention of the word for gratitude in the Torah. It was the word our Matriarch Leah used when she bore her fourth son, Yehudah. When she bore her first child, Leah was grateful to G-d and expressed it in the name of her child: "Reuvein-Saw my suffering" because, "G-d saw my suffering, and now my husband will love me." When she had her second child, she said, "G-d heard that I was despised," and she named him Shimon (which means "He heard"). When her third child was born, she named him Levi (meaning "attachment"), stating: "Now my husband shall attach himself to me."

Note that these expressions of gratitude to G-d, as reflected in the names of her three sons, were focused on the benefits she received from G-d with each child. Note, as well, the specific and personal nature of each of these expressions of gratitude: "G-d saw my suffering", "G-d heard that I was despised", "My husband will become attached to me."

When she bore her fourth child, Yehudah, there was a radical change in the way she named him. All she said was: "This time I will thank G-d. She therefore named him

Yehudah." The word Yehudah is derived from the word in Hebrew for gratitude. This means that the gratitude she expressed at this moment ("This time") was unprecedented. No other person was named "gratitude." Why the change?

Leah's maternal and spiritual need for children was already satisfied by her first three children. She got all that she had wanted. Her husband would now love her and attach himself to her. She had her full share of the tribes that were to come from Jacob's four wives. Now, she stated, I am expressing pure, unadulterated gratitude to G-d. She did not even mention how she benefitted; it's not about her. The only thing that she identifies with is thanking G-d.

Yehudah, the ancestor of King David and Moshiach, is identified with gratitude in its most pure form. Indeed, the word Yehudah contains in it the word for gratitude as well as the four letters of the Divine name. It represents unadulterated gratitude to G-d.

Thanking, Conceding, Confessing

The word for gratitude in Hebrew is also a cognate to the words that mean agreeing or conceding. In a dispute where one side stridently argues a point but then recognizes that the other is right and proceeds to admit and concede, that concession is said to be an act of *ho'doah*. The root is also connected to the idea of confession of one's sins (*viduy*).

The common denominator in all these three forms of the word, gratitude, conceding and confessing, is that they require acknowledgement of the "other" and a willingness to contract one's own subjective existence to allow for the other to prevail. This state is referred to in Chassidic parlance as *Bittul*, which is generally translated as self-abnegation.

Perhaps, this is the deeper meaning of the Talmudic expression that the generic blessing of *Borei Nefashos* is "nothing." This generic blessing calls on the one who recites it to express pure gratitude even though there is no real discernible and demonstrative benefit. This captures the very essence of the blessing. It is a sign of unconditional gratitude and willingness to focus on G-d

even when one's own benefit is negligible. The blessing is only about gratitude to G-d.

The Link To Moshiach

This trait of total self-abnegation—a glimmer of which is expressed through the blessing of *Borei Nefashos*—is ascribed to King David and Moshiach. The entire Book of Tehillim-Psalms is King David's magnificent ode to G-d, expressing praise and gratitude to G-d. In Tehillim, King David finds a multitude of ways to express his gratitude to G-d and the people who were G-d's agents in doing His good.

Moshiach too will be identified by an extreme humility that expresses itself in an unbounded expression of gratitude to G-d and others.

To underscore the role of gratitude as an identifying sign of Moshiach, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 94a) relates that G-d initially wanted to proclaim King Chizkiyahu as Moshiach. When Chizkiyahu failed to sing praise at the miraculous downfall of the Assyrian King Sancherev, G-d changed His mind. As a further illustration of the

importance of selfless gratitude in the Days to Come, according to the Midrash, the only personal sacrifice that we will offer in the Messianic Age will be the Korban Todah-the Thanksgiving offering.

The lesson we are to derive from the above discussion is that one of the ways to hasten the full revelation of Moshiach and our ultimate Redemption is to engage in gratitude; thanking G-d for both the discernible miracles, as well as the generic miracles.

If Moshiach is indeed synonymous with pure gratitude, then we must look for our own ways to be thankful for all the good. Our gratitude for both the absolute necessities of life that we enjoy without thinking as well as the extraordinary miracles that we are witness to in recent times, is expressed in the "non-blessing-blessing" of *Borei Nefashos.*

ESSAY TWENTY

NOW! WOW!

Most people live in the past and the future.

Torah wants us to live in the present.

Teshuvah and Redemption are so powerful because they revolve around the word "now!"

ESSAY TWENTY

NOW! WOW!

"We want Moshiach now!"

"We want Moshiach now!" is a declaration, originally part of a song sung by children at summer camps, and endorsed and popularized by the Rebbe. In this refrain we give expression to our most heartfelt desire to see the unfolding of the Messianic Age through our righteous Moshiach.

When we delve more deeply into this refrain we will discover that the word "now" not only suggests urgency, as the conclusion of this refrain reads, "we don't want to wait," but also contains other more subtle messages that tell us what we have to do in addition to ask for and demand Redemption. One such nuance can be found in this week's parsha, where the word "now" is used emphatically.

The Biblical word for "now" *atah* (spelled with an *ayin*) appears in this week's parsha:

> "And **now** (*v'atah*) O Israel, what does G-d, your G-d, demand of you? Only to fear G-d, your G-d, to follow all His ways, to love

Him, to serve G-d your G-d, with all of your heart and with all your soul."

Now Suggests Teshuvah

The Midrash declares that wherever the word *v'atah* appears it is always an expression of Teshuvah (repentance or return).

In the context of this verse it implies that Teshuvah is a prerequisite for all of which are enumerated in this verse such as fearing G-d, following all His ways etc. Conversely, for Teshuvah to be a proper Teshuvah, it must be accompanied with all of the things enumerated in this verse. Mere thoughts of repentance do not suffice.

We can now understand the connection of "now=Teshuvah" to Moshiach. In addition to Maimonides' statement that Teshuvah leads immediate Redemption, the Zohar teaches us that one of Moshiach's functions is to inspire and influence everyone, even the most righteous, to Teshuvah.

The question is how the ideal of Teshuvah relates to the word "now?"

There are a host of explanations given:

One Moment Now can Change the World

One simple explanation is that when one does Teshuvah past transgressions are erased. One is also not held accountable for the sins he or she might commit in the future. As long as a person is sincere in the present, his sins, past and future, are not held against the sinner. Thus, in Teshuvah, one's status is defined and judged based solely on the present-"now."

Moreover, as the Chassidic classic *Or Hameir* explains, even one instant of Teshuvah, one fleeting thought is enough to change one's status from evil to righteous. This is based on the Talmudic law of a known criminal who betroths a woman stipulating that the marriage will take effect only if he is a righteous person, the marriage is nevertheless valid.

The Talmud's rationale is that he might have had a fleeting thought of Teshuvah a second before he betrothed the woman. Teshuvah is a process of the moment. Teshuvah can happen instantaneously. While ideally Teshuvah can and ought to be a life-long process, even one instant of Teshuvah has a transformative effect.

The above can be applied to Moshiach. As the Rebbe would state repeatedly, based on the Talmud and Maimonides, even one good deed, word or even thought can change the balance, tip the scales and bring salvation to the entire world.

When we say "We want Moshiach **Now**" it may also convey the message that we can make it happen by one thought.

Do it Now!

Another explanation, psychological in nature, is based on a reply the Chassidic Master, Rabbi Chaim of Sanz (known as the Divrei Chaim, the title of his works) gave to a Jew who told him that he "wanted to do Teshuvah." Rabbi Chaim's sharp reply to him was: "Then do it now!"

Human nature allows people to feel good about themselves when they make resolutions. On one hand, we find it difficult to leave go of our errant behavior because of the seduction and pressure of the Animal Soul. On the other hand, we have pangs of conscience and guilt which make us feel uncomfortable. How can we get rid of the

guilt without really making drastic changes in our lives? By making resolutions for the future; putting off our need to change while acknowledging that we must. Hence true Teshuvah is when we say to ourselves: "now!"

When we say "We Want Moshiach **Now**!" we must internalize the message that we cannot tolerate even one more moment in exile. While exile is comfortable for some who might feel that they could countenance Moshiach coming a little bit later after they get the most out of exile, the message of the word "Now" is that we want him now, literally!

From Temporality to Immortality

Another explanation found in the work *Chakal Tapuchin* understands the role of the "fleeting moment-*v'atah*" as the basis and rationale for the efficacy of Teshuvah.

If we consider the negative impact of a transgression against G-d it is difficult to comprehend how we can make amends. The medieval philosopher, Rabbi Yoseph Albo in his *Ikkarim* explains that G-d does not judge us according to His infinite stature and

standards but with the nuanced understanding that we are ephemeral human beings and judges us accordingly. If G-d would view us from His vantage point our transgressions would be considered so egregious that no Teshuvah would be effective. The fact that we are so insignificant and temporal "allows" G-d to accept our Teshuvah.

Hence, the power of Teshuvah lies in our own limited existence; that we live in a fleeting moment, in the state of "now."

The connection to Moshiach is that the reason we want Moshiach now is that we want to proceed from a period of fleeting and temporal existence to a world of permanence; when we will enjoy eternal life, in the physical world.

Looking Ahead

The *Likkutei Maharan* sees the "now" dynamic of Teshuvah as good advice for the sinner who wishes to Teshuvah and turn a new-leaf. One of the impediments to Teshuvah is the penchant some have to wallow in the past. As a result they will

always be plagued by guilt and become powerless to extricate themselves from the quagmire of their past.

Hence to do effective Teshuvah one must focus on the here-and-**now** and not on the past.

To be sure, proper Teshuvah does require expressing remorse for past misdeeds. However, one should not obsess with the past but focus on the present.

Indeed, the entire concept of Teshuvah is disengagement from the past and living in the present, beginning with a new slate.

The connection to Moshiach: If "now" means removing the shackles and anguish of the past, the Messianic Age is the ultimate period of saying goodbye to the pain and suffering of the past. Moshiach represents total freedom.

New Life

The famous Chassidic master, R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev provides a theological explanation for the connectional between Teshuvah and "now."

Every Jew must believe, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak states, that he or she receives a new surge of vitality every instant. Every moment of life is a new gift from the G-d without which we could not possibly survive.

Hence, if we truly believe that each and every moment of life we are a new creation with new life, then Teshuvah can be effective, since we are not the same person that sinned. Teshuvah allows us to detach ourselves from the past, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak states, only if we believe that the present is a new life and that in each moment we acquire a new identity.

Moshiach will usher in an age will take this awareness to another level. We will not only continue to believe in the continuous nature of life; we will see it with our own eyes. We will witness the recreation of everything every moment of existence.

Total Transformation in the Here-and-Now

The Alter Rebbe, in his *Likkutei Torah*, provides a Chassidic/Kabbalistic explanation to the correlation of "now" to Teshuvah. The Alter Rebbe translates the word *v'atah* as the

here-and-now, in contradistinction to the "next world" or the world-to-come, which is the world in which the soul exists without a body. The Alter Rebbe explains that Teshuvah's ability to transform the negative into positive, "darkness into light" is, paradoxically, an otherworldly dynamic which can only be accessed in our physical world.

In the afterlife, where the disembodied soul is spiritually energized it can only relate to the Divine energy that permeates the world because the soul is unburdened by the physical world and is receptive to these energies. It is not receptive, however, to G-d's transcendent energy because it is outside its grasp. By definition, one cannot internalize the transcendent.

In contrast, in our world—the world of "now"—the soul's ability to appreciate G-d's permeating energy is sharply curtailed because of the obstructing properties of our bodies and Animal Souls. However, precisely because of our "handicap," we have access to G-d's transcendent light, which encompasses us and empowers us to transform the lowliest aspects of our world to the most sublime; darkness into light.

The connection to Moshiach is that contrary to a popular misconception, the Messianic Age will not change our observance of Torah and Mitzvos. It is very much a continuation and completion of our "here-and-**now**" world. In the Messianic era the soul and body will still work in tandem to transform the darkness into light. The only difference will be the lack of physical and spiritual threats to our lives. In one way we are unique in that these last moments of Galus/exile provide us with the greatest challenges. In the Messianic Age, notwithstanding the absence of these challenges, we will still be part of the "now" generation, albeit, with enhanced G-dly awareness and spiritual growth.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

GOOD DISEASES?

Our task is to do everything to remove suffering.

We cannot understand the "why" of misery, but we can learn lessons from it.

The only thing that compounds our suffering is our failure to find a silver lining by learning lessons from it.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

GOOD DISEASES?

The Rewards

In this week's parsha the Torah speaks of the blessings that follow from proper observance of the Torah and its commandments. The parsha commences with the words:

> "And it will come to pass that as a result of your listening to these laws, and your care in their observance, G-d will keep His promise to you..."

A few verses later the Torah continues with further promise of reward:

> "There will be no sterile... among you or among your animals... G-d will keep every sickness away from you. He will not give you any of the bad diseases of Egypt which you knew."

The question is asked: Why did Moses add the words "which you knew" when referring to the afflictions of the Egyptians. If Moses was addressing the people who still

remembered the Ten Plagues and the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea they did not have to be told "which you knew." And if they were too young to have a vivid recollection of the afflictions visited upon the Egyptians how could Moses add the words "which you knew." The term "knew" does not simply mean having some cursory knowledge of the experience. Rather it suggests an intimate knowledge of the event, as in the Biblical phrase "Adam **knew** Eve."

A second question can be raised, why the Torah adds the word "bad" to the word "diseases? Which disease is not bad?

A third question one can ask is why is their suffering through the Ten Plagues characterized as a disease? A disease usually implies an illness that is brought on by some natural cause. The suffering of the Egyptians would be better described as "plagues" not diseases.

A Crash Course

To answer these questions we must reflect on the purpose of the Ten Plagues and how they

represent a watershed moment in the development of the world.

The plagues in Egypt were not just intended to punish them for their evil behavior of enslaving and oppressing the Jews for hundreds of years. G-d could have punished them instantaneously if the goal was only punishment. The Torah states that the purpose of the incremental nature of the plagues was to instill within the Egyptians the knowledge of G-d's existence.

In addition, the plagues were intended to make the Jewish nation aware of the existence of G-d, His ability to control nature and His unique relationship with them. If they were to become the "Chosen People"; to receive the Torah from G-d and implement its dictates into their daily lives it was imperative that they receive an introduction to G-d and His unity.

The entire process of the Exodus was, as the Torah itself states, a preparation for history's most momentous event, the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. That revelation at Mount Sinai, in turn, was a prelude to the Jewish people conquering the Promised Land and transforming it into the model G-d had

in mind for the whole world—a world that is permeated with an acute awareness of the unity of G-d. And, our existence in the Land of Israel—with its Holy Temple in Jerusalem—was a prelude to the ultimate Redemption, when the entire world will recognize the unity of G-d.

This entire process began in earnest with the Ten Plagues and the Splitting of the Red Sea with all of its attendant miracles. These were intended to expose the world to the reality of the one G-d.

In effect, one way of viewing the entire Ten Plague ordeal was to view it as an educational process. The Egyptians and the Israelites were both enrolled in a crash course in and through which they were to experience G-d in their lives.

This premise that the Ten Plagues were an educational program is hinted in the promise that we will not be sterile or barren. The Talmud (*Bechoros* 44b) applies that to a teacher who does not have students. It can also be extended to a teacher whose students do not internalize the lessons taught by the teacher.

The question we could ask now is how did all of the "graduates" of this unique program score? Did they pass or fail? If they passed did they make the dean's list?

Mixed Results

In truth, the results were mixed.

This student may have been given the best education from the perspective of the "Teacher," but from the vantage point of many of the students—the course was a failure.

The Egyptians clearly failed the course. While they temporarily pushed for the liberation of their slaves, they quickly reneged and pursued the Jews into the sea—the sea that brought about their own ultimate demise.

There were even a significant number of Jews, who our Sages stated, died in the ninth plague of darkness because they refused to be part of the Chosen People who would leave Egypt and embrace this revolutionarily new way of life. They too failed the course.

Many others who did pass barely made it. In fact their poor grades were reflected in the multiple rebellions such as the golden calf

and the spies, Korach and the ones who complained about the lack of meat and water. And, of course, there were those—such as the Levites and the women—who graduated with honors.

Live Animals

This then is what Moses was saying to the generation that was about to enter the Promised Land. If you will follow in G-d's commandments—particularly, as Rashi states, those seemingly trivial ones—then you will not be barren. Your Torah lifestyle will successfully pass on from one generation to the next.

Moreover, even your animals will not be barren. This may be a reference to the animal soul within each one of us. Even our animal drives and interests will be so inspired by G-d's presence that they will be channeled into positive territory. The animal within us will acquire the ability to reproduce because it will be truly alive it will peacefully coexist with our G-dly souls. A materialistic lifestyle is not truly worthy of the title life because like everything physical it is subject to the law of nature that everything comes to an

end. When the animal within is elevated to the level of the G-dly soul, it assumes the status of a truly living organism that can perpetuate itself. It never dies.

The Forty-Niners or the Sickness of Exile

The Torah continues that with the proper observance of the commandments, G-d will keep every sickness from us. The Hebrew word for illness *choleh* has the numerical value of 49. This relates to the person who is exposed to forty-nine out of the fifty gates of spiritual levels that exist, but cannot reach the elusive fiftieth level; that is illness in the spiritual sense of the word.

This state of illness is identified as *galus*, the exile that we've been through for close to 2,000 years. No matter how close we get to the ultimate in our understanding of G-d—the fiftieth level—that goal proves to be elusive. Exile is where we may get close to realizing our objectives, but we can never reach the goal. Exile to the enlightened Jew is the ultimate experience in frustration.

The Torah thus promises us that ultimately, in the "end of days"—the translation of the

opening word of the parsha and its very name "*Ekev*"—the cumulative efforts of all the generations of Jewish dedication to the ideals of the Torah augmented with our own efforts, will ultimately bring the cure of the illness called exile.

The Torah then continues:

> "He will not give you any of the bad diseases of Egypt which you knew."

The "diseases," one may suggest, refer not to the plagues themselves but to the Egyptian failure to extract the proper lessons from them.

They were afflicted with the disease called exile. Only in their case it was a "**bad** disease" it was a terminal form of the disease. There was no remedy for this form. All of the miraculous plagues did not succeed to change the mindsets of the Egyptians or the Jews who chose to remain—and did remain in Egypt.

These educational devices were rendered not only ineffective but they reverted to being no more than bad diseases. We can attach the word "good" to a disease if there is some silver lining to it. A disease can be "good",

relatively speaking, if it is curable; even more so if it prevents an even worse malady, or if it will teach the person how to lead a more healthful lifestyle. But the Egyptians just got the diseased part of the plague and none of its good.

We are Not Barren

If we avoid the threat of sterility or barrenness by perpetuating our values and learning the proper lessons from history—particularly recent events—we will also have the power to cut short the negative parts of the disease associated with exile and be cured from its debilitating effects.

Thus Moses tells the generation that is poised to enter into the Promised Land—and who symbolize, and whose actions portend, our generation, the last of exile, which eagerly anticipates the imminent arrival of Moshiach—that they/we should not suffer from the bad diseases of Egypt.

Moses also adds the words "which you knew." Moses was alluding to the fact that this new generation did have the intimate knowledge and appreciation for the educational message

of the Ten Plagues. They were unlike the Egyptians and the assimilated Jews who perished in Egypt who did not know—i.e., experience and internalize—the educational lessons of the miracles of the Ten Plagues.

As we stand on the threshold of the Promised Land, on the cusp of the final Redemption, we have to "open our eyes" and see that all that has happened in the past—the good things as well as the negative experiences—must serve to instill within us the need to get out of our own modern day version of Egyptian Bondage.

There is obviously no suggestion that we understand or justify the suffering in any way—that goes contrary to the Torah that tells us to "demand" of G-d to bring an end to all suffering, its "silver linings" notwithstanding.

Rather, it means to look at the unusual events of the past—especially of the ones that occurred in the most recent past—and let them inspire us to demand the revelation of Moshiach and the ushering in of the Age of Redemption!

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT

Giving your life for a cause is not necessarily the highest level of devotion. It might actually be an expression of one's ego.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT

Where is "With All Your Might?"

Sometimes we learn lessons from what the Torah does not say. Such is the case with regard to a glaring omission in this week's Torah portion, *Ekev.*

Almost everyone is familiar with the Biblical exhortation to love G-d "with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." This verse, contained within the *Shema*, appears in last week's Torah portion, *Vo'eschanan,* and is addressed to every Jew as an individual.

In this week's Torah portion of *Ekev,* we find several of the exhortations mentioned in last week's Torah portion. One of the salient differences between them is that in this week's Torah selection, the commandments are addressed to the nation as a whole.

The problem arises when we compare the way the commandment to love G-d is mentioned in these two portions. In last week's portion, the Torah speaks of three

levels of love: "[with all your] heart, soul and might." In this week's Parsha, by contrast, the Torah only speaks of loving G-d "with all your heart and soul." No mention is made of loving G-d with all your might. Why this difference?

Giving More than Your Heart and Soul

To answer this question it would serve us well to clarify the difference between loving G-d with all your heart and soul and loving Him with all your might. What more can you give G-d than your heart and soul?

In truth, love, even when it is of a passionate nature is always limited. Love is an expression of the feeling of an inner void without the person or thing that is loved. No matter how much we are prepared to do for the one we love, there is always a trace of selfishness. I love G-d because He is good to me. I love G-d because He is great. Whatever the cause of love, there is always the sense that it is measured by what there is in it for the "I."

Even when the passionate love – expressed in the words "With all your heart" – moves to a higher rung, whereby one is prepared to give

one's life for the other – as expressed in the words "With all your soul" -- there still is a feeling of, "I cannot live without you." When applied to the love of G-d it means that one's love for G-d is so powerful that the soul cannot stand to be in a world which will force it to compromise its devotion to G-d. This too is a subtle extension of the ego of one's G-dly soul.

The ultimate level of love is, "with all your might." When one is so overwhelmed by G-d's presence, to the point that the ego is totally suppressed, one cannot help but to express G-d in everything s/he does. No matter what one's natural impulses dictate, the individual who is consumed with the selfless and self-abnegating love of "with all your might," will comply with G-d's will. No matter what seemingly insurmountable obstacles seem to exist, the "with all your might," individual overcomes them.

[See, however, the next essay where it is explained that the highest level of *yirah* transcends even the highest level of love because it is the ultimate in self-abnegation.]

For the one whose love is selfless, there are no barriers. It is unlimited and infinite,

because on this level of love, one is in touch with the infinite and limitless energies of G-d.

The Love of the Future

We can now understand why in this week's Torah portion the expression "with all your might" does not appear. A close look at the context of loving G-d which appears in this week's Torah portion, will show us – as the Talmud notes – that it is addressed to a materialistic generation, whose focus is on worldly pursuits.

In the words of the Talmud, "They are [therefore] not fulfilling the will of the Creator." Even when they express their love for G-d, thus, it is considered as if they are not really fulfilling His will, but their own will. On this level, one can still love G-d with all their heart and soul.

The ultimate goal, which we will realize in the Era of Redemption, is to love G-d "with all your might," which, when translated into everyday behavior, motivates us to do everything in harmony with G-d's will.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

FEAR G-D? WHY NOT JUST LOVE?

Even simple emotions contain elements of profundity.

Fear of G-d and self-abnegation are two sides of the same coin.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

FEAR G-D? WHY NOT JUST LOVE?

Beginning or End?

Judaism is about our relationship with G-d. All relationships involve our emotions. In the man-G-d relationship, the Torah emphasizes the emotions of *ahavah*-love and *yirah*, generally translated as fear. Indeed, one of the most repeated demands G-d makes of us in His Torah is to fear Him. For example, in last week's parsha the Torah states:

> "G-d commanded us to perform all these statutes to fear G-d..."

This verse makes the fear of G-d to be the very goal, objective and end-all of Judaism.

And again in this week's parsha the Torah states:

> "And now Israel what does G-d ask of you; only to fear Him..."

The very first thing mentioned here is fear of G-d, which suggests how important it is relative to all the other traits and behaviors G-d wants of us. Note the contrast between these two verses; in the preceding verse fear

is the end point, in this verse it is the beginning. Indeed, King Solomon echoed this idea in Ecclesiastes, "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d."

Which is it, the beginning or the end?

Fear in the Messianic Age?

If there is any doubt about the Torah's placement of fear on the top of its objectives we find the prophet Yirmiyahu (32:39-40) referring to fear, and fear exclusively, as the ultimate nature of our relationship with G-d in the Messianic Age.

> "I will gather them out of all the countries where I have driven them...and I will bring them back to this place... And they shall be My people and I will be their G-d. And I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever... and I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me."

All of the above, at first glance, is difficult to comprehend. Why would fear of G-d be placed at the beginning and the end of G-d's demands of us? Especially, with regard to the

end wouldn't it be more appropriate to say that the ultimate goal of observing G-d's commandments is to achieve love of G-d? Why this great emphasis on fear?

Particularly with respect to the Messianic Age, when we will bask in G-d's radiance and the entire world will serve G-d as one, it is puzzling to be told by the prophet in G-d's name that we will ultimately come to fear Him! While it may be necessary to instill fear in the hearts of uncivilized, immature, rebellious, or insensitive people who would not behave properly without an element of fear, why do the spiritually liberated people of the Messianic Era have to fear G-d in order to keep themselves in check?

Moreover, the prophet does not even mention the love of G-d. If it at least he would have mentioned fear and then love we might have explained it as a reference to different classes of people that will live in the initial period of the Final Redemption. There might be still some exile "holdouts" who are caught in a Galus time warp. For them it may be, temporarily, necessary to emphasize the fear element. But, in addressing the more sophisticated elements of the Messianic Age,

the prophet should have mentioned the goal of loving G-d.

This would have been a satisfactory explanation had the prophet mentioned both fear and love. However, the prophet leaves out love entirely and mentions only fear. Why?

The Uniqueness of the Holy Tongue

To answer these questions it is crucial that we recognize that our understanding of the demand to fear G-d is based on a faulty premise. The Hebrew word *yirah* which is generally translated, not incorrectly, as fear actually has a completely different connotation.

And this is one of the problems with translating the Torah from its original into any other language, particularly English.

Hebrew, or more precisely, the Holy Tongue, the language of the Torah, is a concise and succinct language. One word can have multiple meanings. Moreover, in the Holy Tongue when a word has multiple meanings they may all be connected. The word then

acquires a nuanced meaning that could not be conveyed by the individual translations.

Multiple Translations

Let us examine the various denotations/connotations of the word *yirah:* fear, respect, shame, awe, reverence, surrender of ego, and self-abnegation. When we recognize what all these translations have in common we will understand that *yirah* is indeed the most powerful and profound expression of our relationship with G-d worthy of the future Messianic Age.

Let's take the first and most frequent rendering of *yirah* as simple fear. In dissecting the anatomy of fear we should define two things: What is fear and when does a person experience fear?

Fear occurs when a person confronts an overwhelming person, thing or situation and reacts by recoiling and retreating. While love is attraction and a desire to get closer to the object of one's love, fear is the opposite. We want to keep as far away from the source of fear as possible.

In simple language love is running towards something while fear is running away from it.

From this simple description of fear and how it differs from love another difference emerges.

When we experience love and are attracted to the object of our love it is actually a self-centered feeling. The object of our love will provide us with pleasure or benefit. Love is engendered when we recognize there is something that the other (person, thing or experience) has to offer and that it will enhance us. This is true whether what we love is physical or spiritual. If a person loves to learn Torah, for example, while it is an undeniably a virtuous love, there is an obvious sense of gain and pleasure to be experienced in that spiritual and noble exercise.

Fear on the other hand, expresses one's helplessness and diminished state.

This is the common denominator of all the aforementioned connotations of the word *yirah*: fear, respect, shame, awe, reverence, surrender of ego, and self-abnegation. In all of these permutations the person retreats from the object of *yirah*.

When one has an awareness of G-d's greatness one feels diminished and humbled. In an unsophisticated and immature individual it manifests itself by a sense that G-d is so powerful that doing something against Him will prove destructive. On this plane, our ego is greatly contracted, but it is still not totally self-effacing; there is a sense of not wanting to lose or diminish our existence. We are looking out for ourselves even as we are humbled.

Deeper Levels: Shame and Self-Abnegation

On a deeper level *yirah* is a sense of shame due to the realization of our shortcomings and limitations in relation to and in the presence of G-d. In this mode, the degree of humility and diminution is more profound because we are not focused on saving our skin, as it were, but just to hide in shame realizing our own lowliness.

However, even in this level the focus is still on ourselves, albeit a diminished and humbled self. We are not trying to secure ourselves, but we feel embarrassed. There is an "I" that feels diminished.

On the highest rung, the person reaches such a sense of self-abnegation that the ego is totally removed and he or she becomes one with G-d.

This explains Judaism's emphasis on *yirah*, even more so than *ahavah*-love. Although a human being must encompass both, the ultimate level of connection to G-d can only be achieved through the highest level of *yirah*. Even the most exalted level of love for G-d dictates that our ego is still somewhere to be found and is made more whole and complete by our closeness to G-d. *Yirah*, by contrast, transcends our ego and is the ultimate catalyst of growth for our souls. Indeed, this level only will be fully realized in the Messianic Age.

Lowest is Linked to the Highest

Chassidic philosophy maintains that although fear of G-d is the lowest rung of *yirah* it has something in common with the highest level. First, when we express fear of something it indicates that we are totally aware of the presence of the other. Indeed, the word *yirah* can also be read as "see." One who sees the

presence of the formidable other will recoil in fear.

It may also be suggested that the English word "fear" as well as the word "aware" both derive from the dual sense of the word *yirah*, which is an awareness that generates fear.

In addition, even the lowest level of *yirah*/fear shares another characteristic with the highest level of *yirah*: the loss of ego. The mere fact that it shares that characteristic is an indication that inherent in and underlying the fear is a spark of awe and reverence to the point of self-abnegation. This spark is waiting to be ignited into a full-fledged awareness of G-d and unity with Him.

As we stand on the threshold of the Final Redemption when the highest level of *yirah* will be manifest, we can prepare for it even by experiencing the lowest levels of awareness. This awareness begins at the start of our day when we awaken and recognize that we are alive and in G-d's presence.

That awareness is followed by the recitation of the Modeh Ani prayer, in which we thank G-d for simply being alive. But even this simple "low level" acknowledgment begins with the word *Modeh*-thanks and only

afterwards is followed by the word "*ani*-I." In English translation it would read, "Thanks I give." Why is thanks mentioned before I?

Because inherent and embedded in this simple declaration of our awareness of G-d is a spark of the highest level of *yirah*-awareness.

We should therefore never underestimate the simplest positive gestures, for they contain great spiritual treasures that await our discovery and use and which pave the way for the attainment of the highest levels of *yirah* with the imminent arrival of Moshiach.

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

A TALE OF TWO SCENARIOS

Divine energy flows in two directions:

From the source to us and from us to the source.

Redemption is when the two flows meet in the middle.

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

A TALE OF TWO SCENARIOS

The Two Portions of the Shema: Similarities and Differences

A Jew's most important prayer is the well-known Shema, which contains three paragraphs, the second of which is taken from this week's parsha of Ekev.

When we contrast the first two paragraphs of the Shema we can see many similarities and many differences between them.

The most obvious similarity is their emphasis on loving G-d and observing His commandments, specifically three Mitzvos: Torah study, Tefillin and Mezuzah.

However, there are also significant differences between the two sections: the most glaring one is that the first paragraph speaks to the Jewish people in the singular while the second paragraph speaks to them in the plural.

Another conspicuous difference is that the first paragraph exhorts us to love G-d, "With all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." The words "with all your might" are omitted from the repetition.

The Order of the Three Mitzvos

However, even in the enumeration of the three Mitzvos there is an obvious inconsistency. The first paragraph lists the Mitzvos in the following order: a) Torah study ("You shall teach them diligently to your children..."); b) Tefillin ("Bind them as a sign upon your arm and let them be ornaments between your eyes."); and c) Mezuzah ("And write them on the doorpost of your house and upon your gates.")

When we survey the second paragraph of the Shema we find them in a different order: First Tefillin, then Torah study and finally, Mezuzah.

Commentators have wondered why the Torah changed the order to put Tefillin before Torah study? And how do we explain the other differences (i.e., singular versus plural,

loving G-d with all your might and its omission).

We also want to understand why the Shema, in both of its sections, mentions only these three Mitzvos.

Two Audiences

One way of understanding the textual differences is to view them as G-d directing His message to us in different situations or in different time periods.

The Talmud (*Berachos* 35b) actually intimates the root of the differences between the two sections by focusing on another difference: the second portion speaks of how if we abide by G-d's word, "...then I shall provide rain for your Land in its proper time, the early and the late rains, that you may gather in your grain, your wine and your oil..."

The Talmud asks, how do we reconcile our need to gather the produce with the prophetic prediction that G-d will provide for us? The Talmud's surprising response is that this prediction anticipates the day when the Jewish people fulfill G-d's will. The reference

in the second paragraph of the Shema to the Jewish people gathering their own produce, conversely, alludes to times when they do not fulfill G-d's will.

Chassidic thought explains that this is indeed the crux of the difference between the first section of the Shema and its second section. In the first section, it deals with situations in which we rise to the highest and maximal level of devotion to G-d, expressed by the words "with all your might." It reflects a spiritually sophisticated period where there are no limits to our devotion to G-d.

In the second section, notwithstanding its mention of loving G-d, the words "with all your might" are absent, reflecting a minimal level of devotion. As a consequence of their, relatively speaking, non-compliance with G-d's will, the Jewish people will have to exert themselves and gather in their own produce.

The Rebbe explains that the second paragraph reflects a period of exile in which only the minimum standards of devotion to G-d are maintained.

This premise is supported by Rashi's comment on the words: "You shall place these words of Mine upon your heart and

upon your soul" which precedes the commandment to put on Tefillin:

> "Even after you will go into exile be distinguished through Mitzvos; put on Tefillin, make Mezuzos so that they shall not be new to you when you will return."

Differences Explained

This also explains why the first section addresses the Jewish people in the singular. In spiritually heightened times the Jewish people are unified both spiritually and physically, as opposed to the period of our exile, when we are fragmented. Indeed, even the wicked Haman acknowledged this exile phenomenon when he charged that the Jews are "scattered and dispersed among the nations." He was speaking not only of their geographic separation but also of their internal divisions.

We can now attempt to understand why these three Mitzvos are singled out among all of the others in these two sections, albeit in a different order.

The Three Mitzvos: Instruments of the Bais Hamikdash

These three Mitzvos serve a dual function. One cannot compare the focus and effects of these three Mitzvos in times of exile to their focus and effects in times of spiritual advancement such as in the days of the Temple.

When the Bais Hamikdash stood and generated holiness throughout the world, a Jew was able to experience this holiness in his own life. This can be compared to the ubiquitous radio waves, which require one to have the requisite instruments to have access to them. Without a radio, for example, we cannot access the radio waves that are in our midst.

The instruments that enabled a Jew to experience the holiness generated through the Bais Hamikdash started with the brain's absorption of the Divine intellect. The Bais Hamikdash, Tanya explains, is the brain of the universe. All of G-d's most sublime energy enters the universe through the Holy of Holies in the Bais Hamikdash. To absorb this divine intellectual energy one's mind had to be saturated with Divine knowledge.

From the human mind, the energy traveled to the heart and the rest of the body through the Hand Tefillin which are bound around the arm, near the heart, and the Head Tefillin with its straps flowing downward reaching the legs. This was our way of channeling the Divine energy that manifests itself in the head onward to the entire body. In this manner the Divine energy affected every aspect of our behavior controlled by the body.

Once the people received and internalized the Divine energy emerging from the Bais Hamikdash, they placed a Mezuzah on their doorposts, through which the energy extended itself into their homes and, through their homes, to their environment and the entire world.

The Three Mitzvos: Creating our Own Sanctuary

In times of exile, when the Temple's presence is hidden from us and its light is concealed, the necessity and focus of these three Mitzvos changes. Since we lack the physical structure of the Bais Hamikdash with its concomitant channeling of Divine light, we must create a Sanctuary in ourselves. In this context, these

Mitzvos are no longer instruments to access the flow of energy from its Source. Instead, we have to create our own generators, our own personal Sanctuaries, to generate our own individual Divine light.

The first step to creating our personal generating capacity is performing the Mitzvah of Tefillin. The Zohar (1:129) states that Tefillin are a miniature Sanctuary in their own right and it is to them that the Torah refers when it dictates: "Make for Me a Sanctuary and I will dwell in them." Our head and arm serve as the Cherubic figures perched atop the Ark and the Tefillin represent the Divine presence within the Ark.

Once we have created the Sanctuary, we shift focus to Torah study, concerning which our Sages state, "From the day the Temple was destroyed the only place G-d has in this world is the "four cubits of Halacha (Torah law)."

While, Torah study and Tefillin both serve the function of creating a dwelling place for G-d akin to the Temple, it is Tefillin that take precedence. The reason is found in a famous Midrashic comment recording a conversation between the Jewish people and G-d,

occasioned by their exile-affected state of existence:

> "We want to study Torah day and night but we have no time. Says G-d to them: Observe the Mitzvah of Tefillin and I will regard it as if you have studied Torah day and night."

This exchange describes the state of Jewry in times of exile, when we are preoccupied with mundane activities for our sustenance. In times like these, Tefillin substitute for continuous Torah study and therefore are listed first.

Once we have created the ideal Sanctuary in our own lives we extend the Divine energy we just generated beyond our own bodies to our homes and the entire world. The Mitzvah of Mezuzah enables us to transform our entire home into a Sanctuary, not just our mind and bodies. Through the aggregate power of all our Mezuzos we can transform the entire world into a Divine Sanctuary.

Convergence of Two Directions

The element that changed from the first paragraph of the Shema to the second is the

direction of the flow of Divine light. In the times of the Bais Hamikdash the light flowed from the Temple outward to the rest of the world through the instruments of Torah study, Tefillin and Mezuzah. In this period of exile we generate the light within ourselves through our Tefillin, Torah study and extend it outward through the Mezuzah.

The desired end result of our creation of miniature Sanctuaries and the holiness they engender is that they should so permeate the world that it will bring about the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash. When that happens, the Divine energy emanating outward from the Bais Hamikdash will merge with the Divine energy emanating from our own Sanctuaries. The fusion of these streams of energy, each with its own distinctive quality, will form a world in which we will experience the highest and most internalized form of Divine revelation. This is the revelation of Moshiach.